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Lukas Foss interviewed by Ellen Taaffe Zwilich at Carnegie Hall on April 30, 1996.

Transcript of recorded interview: Lukas Foss interviewed by Ellen Taaffe Zwilich at Carnegie Hall on April 30, 1996.

From the Library of Congress in Washington, DC

Lukas Foss:

So the two composers you've already done this to were Babbitt and Diamond, no?

Ellen Taaffe Zwilich:

Diamond and Gould.

LF:

...and Gould. That's it.

ETZ:

yeah.

LF:

Diamond and Gould.

ETZ:

I'm so glad we got the interview with Morton.

LF:

That's, yeah, that's really good.

ETZ:

It's a tragedy, you know, he had so much life in him it seemed that he was way too young to go.

LF:

And who is next after me.

ETZ:

Oh! Uh, uh. Ned Rorem next week and...
Assistant: Should I just put these here, is that…?

ETZ:

Yes, that's a good idea.
Assistant: Do you want more?

ETZ:

I don't. Is this, is this the caffeine
Assistant: That's the Caffeine, that's the non.

ETZ:

Okay.

LF:

Is… there's a drop of milk there? Wonderful.

ETZ:

He doesn't have a Carnegie Hall mug? What is this?
Assistant: [unintelligible]

ETZ:

[laughter] Going to have to do something about that. I mean, after all...

LF:

There are Carnegie Hall mugs?

ETZ:

I don't know? Why not? There should be. There's every other kind of mug.

For the record, I'm Ellen Taafe Zwilich. I hold the first composer's chair at Carnegie Hall. Today is April 30th, 1996. We're here in the Carnegie Hall Archives with composer, conductor, pianist, Lukas Foss.

Assistant 2: I'm sorry, could you give me one second. Tape for the…

ETZ:

Lukas, I introduced you as composer, conductor, pianist. It seems to me that's the right order. Do you feel that's the right order?

LF:

I feel, I feel very comfortable with that order.

ETZ:

And it seems to me you remind me a little bit of myself in the sense of life sort of coming more and more into focus as you go along and it seems to me its, its becoming more and more the composing as your major statement, it seems to me.

LF:

Well, it was always a little bit that way. I don't know if it's changed much. That's hard to say. I still spend a lot of time conducting and some time playing the piano. So, it's pretty much more of same.

ETZ:

So it's very much then a part of your whole…

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

…structure and your makeup that you do all of these things, then so...

LF:

mm-hmm.

ETZ:

I was very pleased to see earlier this season the New York Philharmonic honored you with a composer week, and I thought that was certainly a tribute to your stature as an American composer. I'd like to run all the way back to the beginning, if you don't mind and, as I mentioned to you this is the third of these conversations with composers in the archives here at Carnegie. And this is the third model of a composer that we have had. David Diamond was our first one, who was born in Rochester. Spent much of his formative time as a composer in Europe and then returned to the United States. Morton Gould, who was born in Queens and really made a life of music probably within walking distance of where we are sitting right now. And now you who are first generation American composer and perhaps you could talk a little bit about your background, your childhood, and your schooling, and family, and so on.

LF:

Certainly. I was born in Berlin and, age 11 I came to Paris and age 15 to these United States, namely New York, so I've been in America ever since.

ETZ:

Lukas, was there some precipitating event that, that caused your family to leave?

LF:

Of course. The Nazis. Yes, it was clear to my father that things were getting worse way back already in 1933, said "We've got to go immediately." And then in 1937 he decided we was we were still to close to problems and trouble in Paris and that's when we came over here.

ETZ:

Yeah. When you were in Berlin, you were, you must have been 10, 10 or 11 when you left…

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

What was your awareness of the political situation?

LF:

I think I was aware of it, but being a child and being very optimistic I never really, I was never afraid for my life or anything like that. Which was very naive of course, but I thought everything was going alright.

ETZ:

And you were studying?
Camera Person: Just a… [unintelligible]

ETZ:

Oh.

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Excuse me. I was just wondering, were you, you were already studying music, of course, as a child in Germany. Did you have important teachers at that age?

LF:

I started at age 7 with Julius Goldstein Herford. He left when he came to America at the suggestion of my mother. He left out the name Goldstein, just took his…

ETZ:

mmm.

LF:

…his second name, married name Herford. And he came here, I forgot what year it was, but I think it must have been roughly 1944, something like that. And I remember Robert Shaw saying to me, “With whom did you study? You’re, you’re so young and you’re such a good musician.” And I said, “Yes I had a very good teacher. Do you want to study with him? He’s just arrived in in New York.” [ETZ laughter] And he did.

ETZ:

That’s interesting.

LF:

So, Julius Herford became Robert Shaw's teacher and many other people's teacher here. He taught at Bloomington, Indiana.

ETZ:

Mmm. Isn't it amazing how interrelated we all are, it's really quite extraordinary, that this fabric of musical life that weaves all these strands together in…

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

When you went to Paris, then, did you continue your schooling in…

LF:

Absolutely. I studied piano with Lazare Lévy, composition or rather harmony with Noel Gallon, I studied solfège, flute, with Louis Moyse and one lesson with Marcel Moyse's father.

ETZ:

Oh really?

LF:

And what else did I study? That was it for Paris, I guess. Those were the Paris days. Conducting didn't start until I came to the Curtis Institute, age 15…

ETZ:

mm-hmm.

LF:

…and enrolled in Fritz Reiner's conducting class there.

ETZ:

Did you drop the other instruments?

LF:

I dropped the flute because I was only allowed to have three scholarships, so I studied at Curtis composition, piano with Vengerova, and conducting with Reiner.

ETZ:

So the, your recent flute concerto is a return to your past in a more direct way then I had thought.

LF:

Maybe that's why I decided to make it a Renaissance concerto. I don't know what prompted that but to me the flute is a kind of Renaissance instrument.

ETZ:

mm-hmm.

LF:

There's nostalgia involved, I think.

ETZ:

And a rebirth of an old love or…

LF:

Maybe, maybe that must be it.

ETZ:

Well, that's…you came in about 15 to this country, right?

LF:

Exactly.

ETZ:

And, that's awfully young to go to Curtis, that must have quite an audition, I imagine.

LF:

I'm sure I was not the only one 15 years old to study at Curtis. Curtis has some young people.

ETZ:

mm-hmm.

LF:

It was about maybe…

ETZ:

Did you go to study conducting? You said…

LF:

Yeah, right away with Fritz Reiner. I still remember auditioning for him. He pushed a score under my face all saying, “well, what’s that?” I said, “Slow movement, Beethoven fourth,” “Ok, I’ll take you. Goodbye.” [ETZ laughter] That’s the shortest audition ever. And then as I was about to get out the door he said, “One more thing,” as if he had said anything, “You probably think you’re young, to learn how to conduct, you’re almost too old!”

ETZ:

Oh boy!

LF:

And by the way, being a, having come from Paris I was in knee pants.

ETZ:

Yes. Which made you look terribly old, yes, of course. Who were some of the other musicians? I mean, you mentioned you had studied with Vengerova. That’s really quite another subject but who were some of the other students at the time at Curtis. You know, I’m asking you questions that I probably know the answer to.

LF:

Who studied at that time at Curtis? Well I know Gary Grafman also studied with Vengerova. And also came to Curtis very young. I don’t remember who other Curtis students were there at that time.

ETZ:

Did you meet Bernstein there?

LF:

Yes, I met Bernstein as a matter of fact, in Fritz Reiner's conducting class and then we were both picked to go to Chicago and see, and watch him conduct Rosenkavalier.

ETZ:

Ooo!

LF:

And on that trip we really became good friends and he was like an older brother to me ever since.

ETZ:

Yes, we have some lovely pictures that sort of chronicle that friendship that we'll get to in a moment. What was it like studying with Reiner?

LF:

He was kind to me because I was so young, I think, but he could be very hard on his students. I mean I remember him watching a fellow student in class, an older student, and he seemed to hardly look at him and then suddenly he looked up and said, "Give it up." That was, I mean that was a typical Fritz Reiner attitude.

ETZ:

hmm.

LF:

But to me he was wonderful and he also gave me my first breaks. I remember he did a concert with the Pittsburgh Symphony where he conducted my first symphony and I played a Bach concerto and conducted in all three. I mean that was a real break.

ETZ:

Oh boy! Yes.

LF:

And then later I had, of course, Koussevitzky as a teacher who was equally wonderful to me and like a father.

ETZ:

And that was at Tanglewood?

LF:

That was Tanglewood, yes.

ETZ:

That was Tanglewood.

LF:

By that time I was 17.

ETZ:

You were an old man of 17. When you were studying at Curtis you studied also with Scalero.

LF:

Yes. I…

ETZ:

Was that a pleasant experience?

LF:

Well, uh.

ETZ:

We know him as Menotti and Barber's teacher?

LF:

To be honest, yes, that's why I studied with him, because Menotti and Barber told me you must study with our teacher. But what they didn't realize, that their teacher, Scalero by the time I got to Curtis, he was really not quite alright, he was a little bit getting old.

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

And yeah, so he...I don't think I learned anything from him.

ETZ:

But you were, you learned a great deal from Reiner, I'm sure.

LF:

Yes.

ETZ:

And Vengerova

LF:

And Vengerova, yes.

ETZ:

Let's skip to Tanglewood, who at this point, this is where you met Hindemith and Stravinsky. Is that correct?

LF:

Well Hindemith I met before, but in order to audition for him. I met him just before, but I mean, that's where I really got to know him, in Tanglewood.

ETZ:

Now was he in residence in Tanglewood.

LF:

Yes, composer in residence at Tanglewood.

ETZ:

And this would have been, do you remember the year. 19…?

LF:

Yes, it was the first year of Tanglewood. The very first year, in other words 1940.

ETZ:

Oh really?

LF:

Yeah. I was 17 as I said. And I remember Koussevitzky saying to me, “Well, you’re so young, why don’t you study just with Hindemith, and with me next year because you can’t really do both?”

ETZ:

mm-hmm.

LF:

So I said, “Oh, what a pity because I’ve spent time studying scores and I’ve never had a chance to stand in front of an orchestra, could I at least do the audition?”

ETZ:

mmm.

LF:

So he said, “Yes you can do the audition.” So I did the audition to Till Eulenspiegel. And when that was over he said to me, [with thick German accent] “If you want you will have.” In his wonderful English. [laughs] And that meant I could do both.

ETZ:

That’s, that’s very nice.

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

And so you did.

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

And how was your experience with Hindemith?

LF:

He was very Germanic.

ETZ:

mmm.

LF:

But in a sense he was right to be. He said things like, I remember to one student he said, “What are you afraid of? Writing in my style? While you study with me? Later on you can do what you want.”

ETZ:

mmm.

LF:

That was sort of his attitude. And he once he wrote me a letter just saying, “A conductor...” I mean, pardon me, “A teacher is like a doctor. If you don’t want to do what the doctor says then go and find another doctor.”

ETZ:

hmm.

LF:

That was his urging me to, to submit to what he had to…

ETZ:

And how did you…were you…I can’t see you as too submissive.

LF:

Well he threw me out of class once because…

ETZ:

oh, well [laughter]

LF:

…I was so…I was such a rebel. I was a teenage rebel and he wrote a note to Koussevitzky saying, Koussevitzky read me the note. It said, “I cannot teach Lukas Foss, he wants to know but he doesn’t want to follow.”

ETZ:

mm-hmm.

LF:

And Koussevitzky...

ETZ:

That sounds like a wonderful compliment.

LF:

…said, “that’s exactly what I want my composition students to want to do, to want to know and not to follow." [ETZ laughter] “I’ll make him take you back.” And he did.

ETZ:

Oh.

LF:

In those days I was so lucky. I was always got out of trouble, first into trouble and then out of trouble. But the reason I was such a rebel actually was another reason, in the, thanks to Hindemith I discovered modern music because until that moment I did not like modern music, I liked only Beethoven, Mozart…

ETZ:

What had you heard in Europe?

LF:

Bach and Schubert, oh, all the Classics. I adored the Classics. I didn't like modern music and then I discovered Hindemith and I really got into new music but just as I was ready to study with him I discovered Stravinsky. That was bad timing so therefore, now suddenly Hindemith was no longer the god he was for me after that moment.

ETZ:

Yeah. And you actually came in contact with Stravinsky at Tanglewood, didn't you as I have a picture over there.

LF:

Was it Tanglewood where I first came into contact with Stravinsky?

ETZ:

Well, I…

LF:

It could very well have been Tanglewood. If could also have been the Boston Symphony but this was later I think, yeah.

ETZ:

I have, uh…

LF:

As pianist with the Boston Symphony, that was when Stravinsky came to my studio. That was a little later.

ETZ:

Now you went to the Boston Symphony as a pianist in, what, 1944?

LF:

I came to the Boston Symphony as a pianist, that was probably around 1944, yes, I think that must have been about the time.

ETZ:

Here's a picture of you with Stravinsky at Tanglewood, which we're going to get a better shot of later. And here's a much later picture, of…

Cameraman:

Could you just move your hand a little bit, ma'am.

ETZ:

…you with Stravinsky.

Cameraman:

just tilt it a little bit. I'm getting the shot, yeah, that's good.
Assistant: [unintelligible]

ETZ:

No, it's ok. That's a nice, nice photograph.

LF:

I didn't see a flash, are you sure your picture worked?

ETZ:

whoops.

Cameraman:

Yes.

LF:

It's not flashing but it works anyway.

ETZ:

So when you say you discovered Stravinsky, can you go into a little more detail about that? I'm sure you mean the artist rather than the man.

LF:

I mean the composer, yes.

ETZ:

Yes.

LF:

The compositions. Yes.

ETZ:

And what were the pieces that set you on fire?

LF:

Symphony of Psalms was the first one. Psalm Symphony was the first one I believe, and then came Story of a Solider. I love those works.

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

I just love them.

ETZ:

And, they opened a new vista then, I guess for you.

LF:

Exactly. Exactly. Yes.

ETZ:

Um was it after this time then that you went to Yale, I guess, where Hindemith was?

LF:

Yes, after my first Summer of Tanglewood came a Winter at Yale. That was the time, that was all the studying I did with Hindemith.

ETZ:

mm-hmm.

LF:

A summer and the winter.

ETZ:

[laughter] no spring...

LF:

[laughter] Maybe spring was part of it, I don't know. I'm not sure now.

ETZ:

And, and was that a happy experience.

LF:

Yes, I think we became better as we went along and we became actually friends after I studied with him. But I remember in Tanglewood we had good times too. When we went, when the whole class, we went swimming in the lake. We all, I still remember Hindemith diving into the lake, stomach first. I remember the sound [claps] [ETZ laughs] The sound of Hindemith's stomach on the water.

ETZ:

[laughs] Well at any rate, you, your first performance here at Carnegie Hall came very early and it's interesting what you said about Shaw, having met Shaw when you first came over and shared a teacher, because I see that Robert Shaw gave the premiere of your work called Prairie.

LF:

That's right.

ETZ:

which is a kind of a…

LF:

…in Town Hall.

ETZ:

And that it was broadcast, and that Arthur Rodzinsky, who was then conductor of the philharmonic heard the broadcast and then programmed it for the next season.

LF:

I think that's what happened. Absolutely. And, by the way, that was the first time Robert Shaw conducted an orchestra.

ETZ:

Oh really?

LF:

Because, before that he had always conducted concerts with the choir alone or the choir and piano, but I remember him tell me, "That's the first time I'm conducting an orchestra."

ETZ:

And, of course, he maintains to this day a very close relationship with Carnegie Hall. Let's just pull out a picture of…here's a contemporary picture of Robert Shaw. Ok? And here's some, well that's a posed picture. I also have a manuscript of Prairie. Just a little bit so we could have a little of that. I see these wide open sounds very…

LF:

Those are the opening bars I believe.

ETZ:

Yes. of Prairie.

LF:

The opening bars.

ETZ:

Very American, you, your adopted countr…

LF:

Yes…

ETZ:

…seduced you.

LF:

Exactly, I would say my love for America is due to the music of Aaron Copland and the poetry of Carl Sandburg. I'm now not as close to that poetry as I was at that time. But when I set The Prairie, I mean, that was based on Sandburg's poetry.

ETZ:

Yes.

LF:

And I met Sandburg too. And as a matter of fact, after The Prairie performance, Sandburg took me to a party where he introduced me as demon welter weight composer.

ETZ:

Demon welter weight composer, well…

LF:

Yes.

ETZ:

…my goodness….

LF:

Yes.

ETZ:

That's a rather poetic introduction. We didn't get a picture of Rodzinsky. This is really about that same time. It's a little bit earlier. To your knowledge did Rodzinsky carry a gun to the rehearsal of your work?

LF:

I remember a baton, but there was not a gun.

ETZ:

There is this wonderful story that…

LF:

He didn't conduct with a gun. I would remember that.

ETZ:

There's a rumor that's been around for many years that he attended rehearsals with a gun in his pocket.

LF:

I wonder why.

ETZ:

I don't know. [laughter]

LF:

That would be interesting, but I've heard nothing about that rumor.

ETZ:

Anyway so, you were talking about American influences and here's a young, young boy who's…

LF:

Yes. You see I met Copland even before Tanglewood and I'm trying to remember who introduced me to Copland. Was it Barber, Menotti? I have no idea. Maybe neither of them, but I met him in his apartment in the Empire building.

ETZ:

mm-hmm.

LF:

And he played for me the Second Hurricane, his high school opera.

ETZ:

Oh really.

LF:

And I was very excited and I remember carrying a suitcase that contained dirty laundry, but I was too scared to admit that it was such an irrelevant and irreverent thing that I was carrying with me. I think I pretended there was scores in there, but it was actually laundry. Later on, five years later, as a grown up, I had the courage to tell him about that.

ETZ:

That so. So you were very much welcomed then into the circle of American composers, then…

LF:

Well you see in those days, if you were talented all the doors were opened.

ETZ:

mmm.

LF:

It was not like today. Today if you're talented, so what, another talent, who cares. Today, if you're successful, then the doors open. That's what they want success. And fortunately those days were different. You must have had a hard time because of that. I mean, you, you were so talented but eh…

ETZ:

I think things are very different, yes. When I was coming of age it was much…

LF:

You had to win a Pulitzer Prize to get the recognition you deserve.

ETZ:

Well it didn't hurt. [laughter] But it seems to me that there must have been a wonderful kind of circle of composers, as well as the conductors who were ready to hear a broadcast

and really like the piece and run out a do it the next season. And that's a big piece, that's a long…

LF:

The Prairie is huge, yes. That's almost 50 minutes of music.

ETZ:

So it's…

LF:

It's an oratorio. And it's a work I still am very fond of. And it gets done from time to time.

ETZ:

So I gather there must have been a very nice circle of composers who had access to the major conductors and…

LF:

mm-hmm.

ETZ:

…it's also interesting that some body like Fritz Reiner was teaching, and teaching at Curtis…

LF:

Exactly.

ETZ:

…rather than, you know…

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

…flying back and forth across the ocean and...

LF:

That's right. you know, it's wonderful, I mean and then there was George Szell who heard, I think The Prairie and decided to ask me to write him a short piece, sort of ten minute, twelve minute piece, for a concert he was conducting as guest conductor of the New York Philharmonic in Carnegie Hall. And...

ETZ:

This is the one for which we could not find a program. They've…

LF:

That's right, but I know it happened.

ETZ:

The 40s archives are very sketchy.

LF:

Very sketchy. It was called Ode to Those Who Will Not Return.

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

It sort of…

ETZ:

And this was written just after the war?

LF:

After World War II, right.

ETZ:

mm-hmm. And what was your experience with Szell like?

LF:

Stormy

ETZ:

[laughs]

LF:

I hate to admit that I was such a terribly arrogant bastard…

ETZ:

[laughs]

LF:

…at the time, but I remember that Szell at the first rehearsal, no at the first rehearsal I was just appointed pianist at the Boston Symphony, so I couldn't attend that, which bothered Szell a lot. But I came to the second rehearsal and, at one point, he turned around to me at the rehearsal and said, "You see, this doesn't sound." And I said, "Maybe that's the way you conduct it." And, my god, he turned around, didn't say a word, went through the performance like the professional that he is but didn't speak to me anymore. And that went on for years. And then, you know, about 15 years later I looked at the score and, it's a nice piece but it wasn't orchestrated right. So I thought he was right, I reorchestrated it, sent him the new orchestration and never heard from him, even though I sent it and said, "you were right." Another five years went by and I was conducting in Amsterdam, and I was doing a program of modern music, including however, the Beethoven Grosse Fugue, which to me, is modern music.

ETZ:

Absolutely.

LF:

And, yeah, isn't it though, it's a crazy piece, wonderful piece, I loved it. And when I came back to my hotel I found a note there. George Szell had called. It was a message for me. I couldn't believe my eyes and ears. I called him up immediately because that's what the message said, "Call me." In fact, the message said, "I like your passionate, intellectual approach the Grosse Fugue, give me a ring." I called him up and he said, "You have your calendar here? You'll be conducting the Cleveland Orchestra this year, such and such a date, next year, such and such a date." I couldn't believe it…

ETZ:

Oh my.

LF:

…we were friends again.

ETZ:

That's a…

LF:

But it took twenty years. [laughter]

ETZ:

That's a wonderful story. I wish we had that program, we don't but we do have this program of the The Prairie. When you, why don't you look through this. I'm always struck when we see these programs from the forties, the kinds of advertisements they have.

LF:

It's Todd Duncan, of course. Dorothy Christian, Todd Duncan. Arthur Judson was the manager, yes.

ETZ:

The Philharmonic manager, yeah.

LF:

Of the Philharmonic, of course.

ETZ:

And what was the orchestra like in those days the musicians?

LF:

Wonderful, well I mean, look I was in heaven, I mean and Rodzinsky did a fine job and the orchestra did a beautiful job and really I was lucky. I mean that was sort of my step from anonymity into being a name that people were familiar with.

ETZ:

Yeah, it's…we do… I have one, this photo of when Bernstein made his debut with The Philharmonic and Leonard Rose and this is Joe Pelusi's father, and John Corigliano, and I don't know who the other person is.

LF:

Corigliano's father

ETZ:

Yes. John Corigliano's father. But they had some really wonderful musicians, I mean one thinks of Leonard Rose sitting there and, you know, he was one of the great cellists and…

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

…he was in The Philharmonic at that time. You also remember another concert for which we have no documentation and that is shortly after this performance of The Prairie.

LF:

mm-hmm.

ETZ:

You went to Boston Symphony as a pianist, right?

LF:

right.

ETZ:

Under Koussevitzky.

LF:

mm-hmm.

ETZ:

And then, you've, he brought you here some time in the late 40s

LF:

That's right.

ETZ:

To do the Mendelssohn concerto.

LF:

Right.

ETZ:

And I wish we could find that program but we haven't found it and if we do we'll…

LF:

But there's a pirated record around from that.

ETZ:

Oh really.

LF:

Yes.

ETZ:

Is it out on a…

LF:

I think it was out. I mean because somebody sent it to me and it looked like something that's been sold, packaged.

ETZ:

Well anything's possible, especially from those days, I think that…

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

How did it sound...

LF:

It sounded ok.

ETZ:

When you listened back all those years later.

LF:

Well, it sounded nice.

ETZ:

Were you…did you find that daunting, playing a concerto with Boston Symphony, Carnegie Hall, and…

LF:

Oh, of course. Of course. And it was a nice thing to do. So I was very happy doing it.

ETZ:

You appeared a little later where we have a program with...you actually did the premiere of Bernstein's Age of Anxiety.

LF:

That's right.

ETZ:

And we have…

LF:

The concert premiere, not the ballet premiere. You know, it was written as a kind of ballet for Jerry Robins. And I don't know who did the ballet premiere, but I did the concert one.

ETZ:

Here we go.

Cameraman:

We're going to change… [break in tape]

ETZ:

You ready, Nick?

Cameraman:

Yes.

ETZ:

This is the actual program from the orchestral, here you can sit down. I'll just put this up. The orchestral premiere of the…

LF:

..of the Age of Anxiety

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

Wonderful.

ETZ:

It's funny. Every time we look at one of these old programs there's a corset ad. Makes me glad to be living in the 90s.

LF:

Very exciting.

ETZ:

That must have been fun. hat's a fun piece.

LF:

Do you know that we recorded that work twice.

ETZ:

Really?

LF:

Once with the New York Philharmonic and once with the Israel Philharmonic. That recording took place in Berlin.

ETZ:

mmm.

LF:

Yeah.

LF:

So, also there are two versions. The later recording has the complete score, the earlier one had, well there was still the cadenza in the last movement missing.

ETZ:

Oh my.

LF:

That Bernstein added later.

ETZ:

Yeah. He did Copland's Outdoor Overture

LF:

I think I almost prefer the first recording, if I remember correctly.

ETZ:

Oh, and he did Harold Schapero.

LF:

Yeah, The Dodger.

ETZ:

From the Symphony for Classical Orchestra, which has enjoyed something of a renaissance now.

LF:

Nice.

ETZ:

Then Beethoven Eighth Symphony.

LF:

And I'm still a Baldwin artist. [laughs] Nothing has changed.

ETZ:

[laughs] How do you think programs have changed in this country over your lifetime.

LF:

Well, depending on who the conductor is obviously Boulez's programming is different from Bernstein's. And Rodzinsky's was different from Mitropoulos. every…

ETZ:

Mitropoulos's programs seemed, certainly seemed awfully interesting.

LF:

ooh, yes.

ETZ:

He did long kind of…

LF:

He was a very open-minded musician and he was also a friend of mine and did my music with the New York Philharmonic. He did a piece called Psalms. I remember that performance, I think that was the first performance of that work.

ETZ:

He also did your Song of Songs in 1956.

LF:

Mitropoulos did?

ETZ:

Mitropoulos, with the…

LF:

That's interesting because I remember Koussevitzky doing it, and I don't, that's sort of…

ETZ:

Well I think we have the evidence here.

LF:

I believe you.

ETZ:

[laughs] Let me see where.

LF:

Song of Songs was also done by Bernstein. But I forgot whether it was Carnegie Hall or…

ETZ:

Yes, here's a Song of Songs ,with Mitropoulos conducting.

LF:

Did I?

ETZ:

He also did Skalkottas

LF:

Skalkottas

ETZ:

Yes, Greek Dances, Vaughan Williams Symphony No. 4.

LF:

Yeah, unusual program.

ETZ:

Saint Saëns Symphonic Poem.

LF:

I had wonderful talks with Mitropoulos. I was very fond of him. I thought he was a wonderful intellectual and a wonderful person.

ETZ:

Yes. He must have been. I've read the new book and both David Diamond and Morton Gould had extensive relationships with him and…

LF:

Yeah, I cannot say enough …

ETZ:

People really loved him.

LF:

Yeah, I didn't have an extensive relationship with him, but we had wonderful talks, and some wonderful lunches under his picture in the Russian Tea Room.

ETZ:

Oh [laughs]. What an appropriate spot. Ok this is in January of 1956. This is Mitropoulos and your Song of Songs. Then the Psalms he did in 57? Whoops, making a mess here. Here again it's a very interesting program.

LF:

Let's see, what was it. Oh my goodness. Nobody does that kind of program anymore. That's very interesting.

ETZ:

The author of the book on Mitropoulos seemed, seemed to feel that his programming got him into hot water.

LF:

…into trouble. Well.

ETZ:

But as we look back on it, it looks so interesting, with the adventurous….

LF:

Well, sometimes my programming got me into trouble. In Buffalo, or in, yeah…

ETZ:

Do you think the audience is more or less conservative than it was?

LF:

hmm.

ETZ:

How were you received in the 40s as this young composer, with big pieces.

LF:

You know it really depends where, I don't think, New York audiences were not that conservative. But in other cities they tended to be a little more conservative.

ETZ:

hmm.

Cameraman:

Sorry.

ETZ:

…apropos George Szell. This, this is the letter from George Szell.

LF:

Oh you just found it. In my mementos.

ETZ:

Yes. In your mementos.

LF:

Does it have...

ETZ:

From the Amstel Hotel in Amsterdam.

LF:

Well that was a, Oh my goodness! That's a letter that, that's wonderful.

ETZ:

I like stories that have a happy ending even if it takes 20 years so I mean, that's a…

LF:

That's very nice.

ETZ:

Lukas, here's a chronicle here. I wanted to show these side by side pictures of you and Bernstein at Tanglewood. Now we don't know exactly what date this was.

LF:

It could have been ’42, ’41. I don’t know. It was very early obviously. No it couldn’t have been this early, that’s impossible. Because we weren’t yet married. I wasn’t yet married and I don’t think Lenny was married at that time.

ETZ:

So it must have been around the time that you premiered the…

LF:

Yes, because our wives are turning the pages.

ETZ:

Age of Anxiety. Ok.

LF:

There’s Felicia Bernstein turning for Lenny and Cornilia Foss turning for Lukas.

ETZ:

So we can nail down that time as being very close to…

LF:

So I must have been already 28 years old or 29, maybe even 30. So it was probably around 1950.

ETZ:

Yeah, this is around the time that you premiered the Age of Anxiety with Bernstein

LF:

Yeah, yeah.

ETZ:

That’s a charming picture. I like that.

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

And this is a very nice picture of you and Bernstein, which I figure must be from the 60s.

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

This looks like Carnegie Hall in the background…

LF:

Maybe.

ETZ:

…but there's, there's no notation on the picture as to where it is. And this was a rather intense period of collaboration with Bernstein, we have um…

Cameraman:

We're rolling.
Assistant 1: Alright now…

ETZ:

I believe this would be around the time when, Bernstein at '58 and '60. He did Song of Psalms in '58 and Introductions and Goodbyes in '60, and Time Cycle in 1960. So this might very well have been that time. And then of course, here's a wonderful later picture of you and Bernstein. We don't know where it's from. It looks like it might be a broadcast, because of the microphones.

LF:

Did he do Time Cycle in Carnegie Hall or…

ETZ:

He did Time Cycle in Carnegie Hall in 1960.

LF:

Oh, is that when he did it, twice, in other words, because at the premiere he turned around to the audience and said, “My colleagues and I think highly of this work and even if they’re only twelve people who want to stay in the audience, we’re going to play it for those twelve people.” And he did the whole thing over again.

ETZ:

Oh, I love it.

LF:

It was unusual. I don’t think a 22 minute piece has ever been done twice in Carnegie Hall before.

ETZ:

Let’s see, what the program looked like. Program continued. He started with the Siegfried Idyll, the Schumann Cello Concerto with Leonard Rose playing. Intermission. Pardon me but I always notice when I see these programs that the publishers are advertising scores for sale, which is so different from today’s world.

LF:

Very different, yeah.

ETZ:

I see Carl Fischer was advertising the latest editions in our study score series. Lukas Foss, William Bergsma.

LF:

Wonderful.

ETZ:

…and they were selling Ode and Song of Songs.

LF:

Great. And that’s the program with Time Cycle?

ETZ:

Yes, this is on the program.

LF:

Oh good. So that's the one.

ETZ:

Then. After intermission…

LF:

mm-hmm. Time Cycle, that's it.

ETZ:

…he did the Time Cycle.

LF:

And that's when he repeated it. Yeah.

ETZ:

That's a marvelous story.

LF:

Now, when we did Time Cycle there, we did it with an improvisational ensemble.

ETZ:

Yes, I had…

LF:

And that was an unusual story, because I had never intended Time Cycle to be, to have these improvisations in between the songs. What happened was that I saw Lenny shortly before this performance in Los Angeles where I was then a professor of music at UCLA. And Lenny said to me, "Lukas, you gave your improvisation concerto to Ormandy. How could you do that? Why didn't you give it to me?" I said, "But you're doing Time Cycle. I gave Time Cycle to you." "Yes, but that doesn't have improvisations." So I said, "Well, we

could always be like the clowns in Commedia dell'arte, between the songs my group could come and play, and play improvisations." And I laughed and he laughed. And the next day the New York Philharmonic called saying, we would like to invite you to do just that. And I though, "Oh my God this is just terrible, this piece doesn't require it, doesn't demand it," but we did it and it worked.

ETZ:

That's well…

LF:

It worked. Yeah. It was fun. And then for years I couldn't get rid of the improvisations, even the Berlin Philharmonic, when they engaged me to conduct said, "We've got to have Time Cycle with your improvisation group," and they flew everybody to Berlin to do it just that way. Now, however, there is no longer an improvisation group, and Time Cycle is done the way I had intended. And when Bernstein did the premiere with the improvisation group as he repeated it, he repeated it without the improvisations.

ETZ:

Ah.

LF:

Otherwise it would have been 40 minutes [laughs] all over again.

ETZ:

I see what he was, what Bernstein was talking about, because in this, just, not too far back in our program but I have a concert with Ormandy. Conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra where he does the J. C. Bach Sinfonia, a very interesting idea. I didn't know people were doing J. C. Bach in 1960. Sibelius Fifth symphony, your Concerto for Improvising Solo Instruments and Orchestra…

LF:

That's right.

ETZ:

…followed by the Respighi Feste Romane.

LF:

So that was also in Carnegie Hall.

ETZ:

Yes.

LF:

My God, everything in those days was in Carnegie Hall.

ETZ:

Well, sure, you know, all the days that the New York Philharmonic was in residence all of the important premieres, I think.

LF:

That's right.

ETZ:

Or many of them certainly took place here.

LF:

Well I'm glad you found that.

ETZ:

But that's an interesting little…he was jealous of Ormandy having the Improvisation, and…

LF:

Well, or upset that I didn't give it to him.

ETZ:

Yes [laughs] Now Mitropoulos also did your Psalms in '57. This is about the way he looked at that time, isn't it?

LF:

Yes, like a monk, yes.

ETZ:

'57

LF:

God, yes, that was him alright.

ETZ:

So. Really a wonderful, wonderful man. Now the next thing we have is the New York Philharmonic in 1961 under Kripps doing A Parable of Death

LF:

Oh yeah.

ETZ:

How would you compare Kripps to the other conductors you worked with?

LF:

Well, Kripps was very good in a certain repertory, but he was not the most adventurous conductor when it came to modern music. However, I succeeded him in Buffalo and, I guess that's how he got to know me and my music.

ETZ:

mm-hmm.

LF:

He got interested in who his successor was, I guess. And maybe that's why he did Parable of Death, I don't remember.

ETZ:

So at this time you went to Buffalo?

LF:

Yes.

ETZ:

How long did you stay in Boston? You were in Boston from ’44…

LF:

In Boston, 4 years. I was a pianist with the Boston Symphony for 4 years.

ETZ:

And then you moved back to New York or…

LF:

Yes.

ETZ:

When you were going to Curtis, did you commute from New York or did you live in Philadelphia?

LF:

I commuted from New York. Yes.

ETZ:

A lot of people still do, I guess.

LF:

Yeah. That’s what I did.

ETZ:

So you’ve probably spent most of your professional life in and around New York and…

LF:

Yes.

ETZ:

Now you went to Buffalo in what year, as conductor?

LF:

I think it must have been around 1960 or something like that.

ETZ:

So when Kripps…

LF:

…maybe ’62, I don’t know.

ETZ:

…you, you were saying Kripps found out about you that way and this is from December ’61.

LF:

Yeah. And Parable of Death is a cantata for narrator, tenor solo, and chorus and orchestra. And it’s at the height of my neo-classic period. It’s very Bachian, it’s like, well my love for Bach is all over the place in that, in that work.

ETZ:

hmm. I see that Felicia narrated it.

LF:

Felicia Bernstein, Yes. Did she narrate under Felicia Bernstein or Felicia Montealegre

ETZ:

Montealegre

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

And Rudolf Petrarch was the tenor, Westminster Symphonic Choir. And Kripps did Beethoven 9 on that same program.

LF:

Oh really?

ETZ:

With a young Shirley Verret, mezzo-soprano.

LF:

My goodness.

ETZ:

There again, I see the publishers advertising, an indication of a different age.

LF:

We publishers had more money then, they, because Xerox hadn't yet killed their business.

ETZ:

Do you think Xerox has killed their business or…

LF:

Well sure, you can just photocopy scores instead of buying them.

ETZ:

Um, yeah, it might be other factors too I think, when I'm speaking with composers who are in their 80s today and older, the way they got to know music essentially was through printed music. Um, four hands, even Beethoven symphonies.. But, when you came along, I mean, even at a very young age you...things were already, you know, there were lots of orchestral performances and recordings.

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

So I think that has made a big change in the …

LF:

I'm sure that's part of it, yes.

ETZ:

I remember Roger Sessions talking about how he first had contact with Stravinsky's Rite of Spring, that the word had come over how exciting this piece was and that he drove the horse and buggy into town and bought a four hand version and that's how he discovered it.

LF:

Oh really?

ETZ:

Yeah we have a lovely letter in Roger's hand.

LF:

Yes, I was not a close fan of Roger Sessions, but I got to know him and even was at his house in out of town. It wasn't in New York City. It was somewhere else, I forgot where.

ETZ:

At Princeton.

LF:

Yes, he was a wonderful man, but I never studied with him, so I didn't get to know him as well as some other people did…

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

..who studied with him.

ETZ:

I loved him, I studied with him and he was just wonderful...

LF:

oh you did, that's right

ETZ:

…wonderful person to work with.

LF:

Did you, he also say that to you, namely, "If I knew what the music of the future were, would be, I would write it."

ETZ:

[laughs]

LF:

I remember that statement.

ETZ:

That sounds like Roger. No?

LF:

I remember that statement.

ETZ:

Oh, I found him a very inspiring teacher, I really liked him.

LF:

And a very nice unassuming man.

ETZ:

Yeah. And he didn't intrude upon what it was that I was doing, and…

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Of course, I, I studied with him rather late in his life, so I think he might have been very mellow and still when you look at the number of students that he taught and the different styles that came out…

LF:

Sure, Leon Kirchner among them, many wonderful students. They all loved him.

ETZ:

Oh it's just an enormous list of people all of whom were quite different and, yes we, I think we all loved Roger. This is probably from around the same era, but here's a wonderful telegram from Stravinsky and a postcard. I think this is from '60, early '60s.

LF:

Well Stravinsky was a close friend, yes.

ETZ:

What was he like?

LF:

He was wonderful, wonderful. He once came to my studio in Boston, when he was guest conducting there. I thought he conducted very interestingly. I learned a lot from him, but the Boston Symphony thought that he was amateur conductor.

ETZ:

mm-hmm.

LF:

I remember him saying, "Staccato. Oh." And I though that the "Oh" was very revealing, he didn't want a dry little staccato. He wanted a much more…

ETZ:

A fat.

LF:

…a volcanic one. And I thought he was great. I learned a lot, but everybody imitated him, and poked fun at him because he wasn't the typical conductor who came with the recipe to the orchestra rehearsal, and because he conducted without any showmanship at all. He just beat time and listened. He was all ears. But anyway, I, he decided to come to my studio to hear me play some piece of mine for him and I was very amazed that he would do that, and very happy. And I invited my friends, Irving Fine and Harold Shapiro, to join because they loved him even more than I did. I mean he was their god. So, I shared that experience with Stravinsky, with my friends and he was very interesting. He would say things like, "Why did you give this to the trumpet." "Well it sounds like a trumpet tune, doesn't it?" "If it sounds like a trumpet tune, give it to the violins." Things like that, you know. That you, one remembers forever. But I was a little disappointed that he didn't actually say, "your music is special," or something like that. He just looked at it, very, you know, very professionally but he didn't make any evaluation. However that evening afterwards, from my studio he said, "Would you like to go to a party? I've been invited to a party." I said, "Sure, I would love to go with you to a party." So he took me to the party and at that party he took a little bit of brandy out of his pocket and started drinking his own brandy, which I thought was rather unusual. And he said, "Lukas, do you know that my teacher was Rimsky Korsakov." And I said, "Yes, I do know." He said, "Well, you know, in the lessons Rimsky Korsakov never let on that maybe I was special, but I knew he knew," and he went like this to me [gestures with elbow]. And that little gesture with his elbow…

ETZ:

That's very…

LF:

Against my elbow sort of put me through the next three years, you know. [laughs]

ETZ:

[laughs]

LF:

It meant a lot to me.

ETZ:

Yeah. Well it's a nice combination of treating you like a colleague, you know, that doesn't need a child's pat on the head, you know…

LF:

Yes, wonderful.

ETZ:

…and still letting you know. That's a beautiful story.

LF:

Wonderful. And then later on in California, where he lived, when I became a teacher at UCLA, then we really became friends and we had dinner together at his house, at my house and it was wonderful. It was a real friendship then.

ETZ:

Lukas, let's talk a, a little more about your evolution at a composer. You've mentioned the early admiration for Hindemith, and then Stravinsky and Copeland…

LF:

Right.

ETZ:

…being an important influence. You, you've had a very, it seems to me a very restless creative spirit that kind of is always is open to new ideas. Would you say this is some thing you think about, or…

LF:

Well, I compose because I love music. That means you love other peoples music. And the more you get that, the more you make your own. You know the trick is not to imitate. You know, influences are in everybody's music. That's not interesting, what's interesting is what you do to the influence, what you make of the influence, how you make it your own. So making Copeland, Stravinsky, and all these things your own is enriching to my vocabulary.

ETZ:

I remember a time when you were greatly involved in improvisation. I imagine this would have a profound effect on your, your composing. Can you talk about that a little bit or…

LF:

Yes. What happened is that at UCLA, I wanted to free my students from the tyranny of the printed note as I put it at that time, and change their lives that way. And little did I know that with this experiment that was supposed to change my students that it would change me, but that's exactly what happened. Because my early improvisations with my improvisation group at UCLA, my students sounded as Pengovsky put it once so well, "like music badly remembered."

ETZ:

[laughs]

LF:

Familiar and badly remembered [laughs]. So one day I asked myself, "So what would actually thrive in the improvisational process, what would make it fresh and interesting." And with that question I opened up the whole Pandora's box of avant-garde music and aleatoric music at a time when aleatoric the word that comes from the Greek word alea which means dice had not yet permeated our jargon. It was very early 1950 or something like that when that, or was it 1960 I guess it was closer to 1960 when that happened. And suddenly our improvisations changed. I began to ask my students and my friends to improvise in a different way and we tried to discover things and we suddenly, suddenly we became chance music, became the thing before it. I mean even John Cage said that our improvisations had a certain influence on him, also. It was very early in the game but we, we suddenly became aleatoric. Now that was a very unusual thing at that time, wasn't it?

ETZ:

mm-hmm. yes. And you then, didn't you move to Buffalo after that?

LF:

Yes.

ETZ:

and continued this…

LF:

Then I continued the improvisations in Buffalo, and then I brought my improvisation ensemble to Europe and by that time we did very exciting improvisations that were not at all like music badly remembered. They were very different. And in fact the improvisations in between the Time Cycle songs were very adventurous.

ETZ:

mm-hmm. It seems to me that it, it's a very important part of this is having a group that's used to working together. I remember that Boulez used to say that when there's a score, a modern score that asks for the players to improvise something, he says that you find out what music they know. But if you have an ensemble that's like a jazz group, you know, where there's this interaction and you develop over time. That must have been very interesting.

LF:

Exactly. It became a very interesting experiment, but as you just pointed out after a while one doesn't improvise anymore what one doesn't get, no one improvises what one knows. Like every jazz pianist or every jazz improviser plays the licks that they know. So, as it became less adventurous I gave up on it and I sort of left it to my students, and didn't do it anymore, and became a reserved adventure for the loneliness of my composition studio again.

ETZ:

Still keeping some of these elements alive as in…

LF:

Oh. definitely.

ETZ:

…making collages and…

LF:

Definitely. For a while I used to write pieces that were improvisatory and had aleatoric, then I even gave up on that too, because I found that it swallows up so much rehearsal time. For instance Baroque Variations no. 3, the third Baroque variations, the Bach one,

when I wrote first and which Bernstein premiered, I believe in Carnegie Hall, that one takes so much time. Bernstein spent 6 hours of rehearsals on trying to get the New York Philharmonic to do it just right. He would suddenly turn to the orchestra and say, “Did you hear the sounds you just made? Do you realize you’re the first people ever that made that sound.” It was fascinating, but it took as much time as the entire Mahler Sixth Symphony. And the Sixth Symphony of Mahler is an hour, more than an hour work and my piece is 10 minutes [laughs]. That Variation no. 3 is 10 minutes.

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

So it, just recently Michael Tilson Thomas said to me, “Lukas, I would do Baroque Variation Number 3 all the time, if only you wrote it out. Because I haven’t got time to teach the orchestra how to improvise.”

ETZ:

So, how is it written in fact. How would the score to…

LF:

Well the score looked with all kinds of words that explain what they were supposed to do, and it takes an enormous amount of rehearsal time. So, I find that…

ETZ:

For example, what would be some of the words that you would use? What would be an instruction?

LF:

Well, play…well the instructions would choose from the Bach sheet and play the Bach notes, and don’t play them audibly until called upon by the conductor, and then emerge from inaudibility into audibility. And, oh, it’s very complex actually to do it right, to do the emerging and submerging right. So, when Michael told me this, he said, “please write it out” And I did it, actually. And since then I can do it, and I have enough rehearsal time to do it, and he does it in the new version. Of course, it was very exciting in the other version, in the old one and still occasionally is being done that way.

ETZ:

If the players themselves are that involved in actually creating their own part too.

LF:

Right, yeah.

ETZ:

It's…would you feel that you've been through an evolution as a composer or do you, have you had moments of epiphany, decided to do this and reject what had come before, or…

LF:

Well, I did my style, or I should say my technique changed all the time. We always get style and technique mixed up. I think they are two different things. It's the techniques, Style's basically a personality, but for a neo-classic viol [?] experimentation that was supposed to change my students, I became suddenly a wildly avant-garde composer. And then finally in my third period, if I can call it the third one, I don't know, I combined everything. I combined my early Americana suddenly with some very experimental stuff that I did in that second period. And that's what I do now. I do, anything, anything can happen, in any moment within one movement.

ETZ:

And…

Cameraman:

I should stop. [break in tape]

ETZ:

…now, you're talking about your own work. It's a very interesting point about separating style from technique, and it seems to me that a lot of people seem to think that a composer can create a personality out of techniques and it seems to me that there's something much more profound about the style of the composer's voice. And, it's hard to talk about it but I think it's important for…

LF:

But it doesn't have so much to do with Carnegie Hall. That's the only trouble.

ETZ:

Well, it all has to do with Carnegie Hall because Carnegie Hall, I mean, it's a wonderful building and it's a beautiful stage and all that really exists for music.

LF:

Conducting the ninth symphony at Carnegie Hall was an event, but that was with Buffalo wasn't it?

ETZ:

When did you do that? We don't have all of your conducting.

LF:

Yeah, I conducted the ninth symphony in Carnegie Hall with Buffalo, but not with Milwaukee, if I'm not mistaken. It was only with Buffalo. Yeah.

ETZ:

Do you want to just sort of run through the years and give us a few highlights that you remember.

LF:

I'm not that good at that. That's the trouble. But I shouldn't really talk about things that are not documented, but, on the other hand, I know that for a fact, that I did it, because…

ETZ:

Well that I'm sure is documented. We just didn't pull up, you're just so involved with Carnegie Hall we only pulled up the conductor, I mean, the composer files. And, what was it like to do the ninth symphony here.

LF:

Oh, it was a fantastic experience. And it sounded so beautiful.

ETZ:

And do you remember which chorus you used, or…

LF:

It...I think it was the chorus of… oh what was their name? That, that's pitiful. Margret, no, it wasn't Margret Hawkins. It was the other one, the one from Chicago.

ETZ:

Oh, Margaret Hillis.

LF:

Margaret Hillis.

ETZ:

Well, that's a very good...

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

…very good group.

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

That must have been thrilling. I also find that, no matter how many times you been on this stage or in the hall, there's still something very special about, you know, being here where…

LF:

Yeah. Very special

ETZ:

…all these…

LF:

Although, should I make a confession? I miss the organ.

ETZ:

Uh, yes. [laughs]

LF:

I miss that organ. It was so much part of Carnegie Hall. I was really upset when it suddenly wasn't there.

ETZ:

Well, maybe one of these days they'll put it back. Here's something you had actually inscribed to Carnegie Hall, something from your Cello Concerto. And it was a concert in 1967.

LF:

Oh yes.

ETZ:

That Rozhdestvensky conducted.

LF:

Except, for my…

ETZ:

London Symphony. But you conducted your piece.

LF:

I conducted my Cello Concert and Mstislav Rostropovich was the wonderful cello soloist. Yes.

ETZ:

That...

LF:

I wrote it for him.

ETZ:

Yhis must have been quite a concert, a Vivaldi concerto, 2 Vivaldi concertos, the Lukas Foss Cello Concerto, Boris Tchaikovsky Concerto-Partita for Cello, Harpsichord, Piano, Electric Guitar, and Percussion. And the Shostakovich Concerto No. 1.

LF:

How could one cellist play all these pieces one after another, but he did.

ETZ:

And probably went out to a party afterward too.

LF:

It was like a marathon. Oh, of course.

ETZ:

[laughs]

LF:

of course.

ETZ:

I think Rozhdestvensky was the conductor of the, the BBC at about that time, wasn't he?

LF:

Could well be, I don't remember.

ETZ:

Um, we have, um, um, an inscribed manuscript from the Cello Concerto.

Cameraman:

Can you hold a little…? Yeah, I'm not sure this is ever going to work. Yeah, this, this way.

ETZ:

How's that?

Cameraman:

There we go.

ETZ:

I'd take it out, but Gino would be mad.

Cameraman:

Yeah, just there. Ok.

ETZ:

There. What and evening with that many cello concertos, running from Vivaldi to Foss, must have been...

LF:

Right.

ETZ:

The Shostakovich would have been written for him also, for Rostropovich, yeah.

LF:

I would imagine so, I'm not sure, but I think so.

ETZ:

And you wrote yours for him?

LF:

Definitely. He said to me, "I play fifty concertos, I want yours to be the most difficult."

ETZ:

[laughs]

LF:

And I did it. I wrote such a difficult concerto that practically no one else can play it. [laughs]

ETZ:

Why is it so difficult? Does it have musical difficulties as well as technical then.

LF:

Technical and musical. I don't know how he could memorize it. I could never memorize that concerto but he did.

ETZ:

He's an extraordinary musician.

LF:

I remember how he said to me, "come and I'll play it for you." I said, "Well, certainly, why don't I give you a ring." "I don't answer the phone when I'm memorizing your concerto," he said. I said, "OK, when shall we make it?" He said, "Well, how about two weeks from now." We made a date and, yes, he said, "When I memorize your concerto I'm locked in to my apartment by myself," and so forth. So, when I came to his apartment, I rang the doorbell and a beautiful young woman opened. So that's how you're locked in with my concerto. And he said, "Oh, but I know it!" And he did. [laughter]

ETZ:

Well

LF:

Naughty stories.

ETZ:

They happen. If it works, it works, right. How do you feel about writing concertos?

LF:

Well, I've written so many. I love it.

ETZ:

And you like the idea of really presenting the soloist front and center.

LF:

Well sure, and pleasing the soloist. Doing something that is challenging and, that works for the soloist. And I'm honored that many of my concertos were premiered or played at least at Carnegie Hall.

ETZ:

mm-hmm. Yes, we have a few more here. We have the...of course, Carol Wincenc did your Renaissance Concerto which was…

LF:

Yes. That's right she did that in Carnegie Hall

ETZ:

This is quite a bit later. This is not even bound yet. This is with the American Symphony under Bill Curry. This was the New York premiere...

LF:

New York.

ETZ:

…of the Renaissance Concerto. And, can you talk a little bit more about the piece… we were mentioning the fact that you, when you were quite young in France studying the flute with a very famous flutist. An instrument that you later dropped and picked up with this…

LF:

Well I love the flute. I love the flute and to what extent my early flute lessons had something to do with the success of that concerto I don't know, but it had more performances in six years than almost any other work of mine. I think about 60 different organizations did it.

ETZ:

That's wonderful.

LF:

Yeah, I was lucky with that work. Galway plays it too.

ETZ:

…and he's a wonderful player, he also plays my flute concerto. There's something about the flute that seems to come out of the depths of the human some how or another, that flute sound and it's a very, very attractive instrument, I think. Did you do any improvisation with the flute when you were...

LF:

No, never. No I wasn't much of an improviser until that improvisation project came along.

ETZ:

I was thinking more in preparation for the concerto. Did you…

LF:

No, no.

ETZ:

…haul out the flute again…

LF:

never.

ETZ:

…to see what it felt like?

LF:

No. No I just wrote it.

ETZ:

Do you find you have a finger memory of, for instance I played the trumpet very seriously…

LF:

That's right.

ETZ:

…in high school and for a while in college and then I haven't played it since. But I still have a finger memory for pitches with that instrument. It seems strange but it doesn't seem to leave you.

LF:

Well, I have a finger memory of the instrument but it didn't influence the composition.

ETZ:

It didn't…

LF:

The notes didn't come out of fingerings or that kind of memory.

ETZ:

But a feeling of connection to it, or feeling closeness to the instrument, or an intimacy with it.

LF:

mmm. True.

ETZ:

Here's a performance of a concerto for solo percussion and orchestra.

LF:

Oh, that's right.

ETZ:

With Akiyama and the American Symphony.

LF:

Was Jan Williams the soloist?

ETZ:

mm-hmm.

LF:

He's a wonderful percussionist, he lives in Buffalo. He's not the John Williams who wrote Star Wars.

ETZ:

Well that Jan Williams. [Laughs]

LF:

This is Jan Williams, right? And he's absolutely the greatest, he's wonderful.

ETZ:

Akiyama's a very nice conductor. He's done my work and, of course, I've, I spent seven years in the American Symphony under Stokowski and I remember when Akiyama came to guest conduct us. The Brahms Second, I think.

LF:

But in this concerto the conductor's probably a little disappointed because he's sort of upstaged by the soloist. Because it's the soloist who walks around in the orchestra. And wherever he goes, things happen.

ETZ:

Oh!

LF:

It's quite improvisatory that way.

ETZ:

So this is from when was this, oh, 1972?

LF:

Yes, that was shortly after my improvisation period.

ETZ:

So you were still…

LF:

involved with that.

ETZ:

…influenced by that.

LF:

mm-hmm.

ETZ:

Did he have a setup somewhere, the percussionist, on stage, or did he carry instruments, or did he have…

LF:

He carried things, but they were also setup, both, both. And, at one point he walks over to the timpani and engages in a kind of a battle, playing the timpani from the wrong place from the opposite side.

ETZ:

From the other side.

LF:

Yeah. There's a kind of battle going on between the two timpanists. Which is kind of exciting.

ETZ:

Yeah. I can imagine.

LF:

And then there's this, there's a funny cadenza in which the percussionist hits more and more instruments. First of all, just one or two or three, then four, five, six. Finally, its like a Charlie Chaplin film,

ETZ:

[laughs]

LF:

He hits everything in sight, so… [laughs]

ETZ:

Were you thinking in a sense of a choreography when you were doing this, as well as the musical development, you were thinking of how it would look on stage?

LF:

Well, choreography is probably too grandiose a term, but certainly happening. And those were the days when composers sometimes thought that way, thought theatrically.

ETZ:

mm-hmm.

LF:

And it's true, that concerto is very theatrical from that point of view.

ETZ:

And the going around on the stage, not being anchored to one spot…

LF:

That's right.

ETZ:

…was a very interesting thing around that time. This is 1976.

LF:

mm-hmm.

ETZ:

Lukas, there's a work here called Waves that you've told me you had withdrawn, and...

LF:

That Eleazar de Carvalho conducted in Carnegie Hall.

ETZ:

That's right, with the Pro Arte Symphony Orchestra. He did a Mozart 23rd Symphony, the Brahms 1st Piano Concerto. Incidentally, I saw in your apartment a wonderful picture of Brahms with your great aunt, and it's, it intrigued me and I just, I know you didn't bring it. One of the reasons you didn't bring it is that you didn't want to establish a tie that wasn't there, but it's kind of, I think, interesting for people to think about the span of time and how, well how really short this history is.

LF:

And how small the world is, right?

ETZ:

This was supposed to be your great aunt, right? And how small the world is.

LF:

That's right, you're so right. However, I don't even know how my great, great aunt met Brahms. I don't know anything about, but they're sort of close together in that picture.

ETZ:

Yes, they look very, very friendly.

LF:

Yes.

ETZ:

You said great aunt, or great, great aunt.

LF:

Now see…

ETZ:

Was it your grandfather's sister, or…

LF:

I think it's great aunt, it's not great, great aunt. I think it's great aunt, yes.

ETZ:

So, for instance, are you a grandfather.

LF:

No.

ETZ:

But, but…

LF:

Not yet, I'm too young.

ETZ:

Oh yes, of course. [laughter] But it, you know it's a much closer sort of time relationship than one thinks. Especially since in music so many of us have had telling, important experiences as very young people.

LF:

That's true.

ETZ:

And we've known people who were old. When I was a teenager I knew Ernst von Dohnanyi very well and…

LF:

Oh, wonderful.

ETZ:

…I played in his conducting class. I actually played chamber music with him. And of course, he knew Brahms and it's, sometimes, I think people tend to lump the past in, as something way back there, but it's interesting how those fabrics…

LF:

I wish I had known Brahms.

ETZ:

Yes.

LF:

But I was too young, I couldn't. But I understand that once at a party he insulted everybody, then when he left he said, "I hope those I forgot to insult will forgive me." [laughter]

ETZ:

That's lovely.

LF:

But speaking of family ties, my uncle who was a famous doctor, who invented the gastroscope…

ETZ:

Oh really?

LF:

…was, in his spare time, the conductor of the Doctor's Orchestra in Munich. And he actually orchestrated my early opera, which I stopped after Act 1. I decided Act 1 was childish when I got to Act 2. I dropped the whole project, but he orchestrated that. So he was very…

ETZ:

Must have been an extraordinarily interesting man.

LF:

A very interesting man.

ETZ:

Your family, I think, must have been quite interesting. Your father was a philosopher, wasn't he?

LF:

Professor of philosophy at Haverford College, yes. Although he started out as a lawyer in Germany.

ETZ:

And, wasn't allowed to practice at a certain point, or…

LF:

Well, you can't practice German law here, I mean, in…

ETZ:

But I mean in Germany, he practiced law in Germany and then when you left.

LF:

That's right, he had to do something else, so he took up philosophy, because philosophy was actually his first love. He was actually a student of, who was it again, oh a very famous philosopher, right now. And, and he wrote philosophy books while practicing law in Germany.

ETZ:

Oh really.

LF:

And then wrote some more books in America. So yes, he was a very interesting man.

ETZ:

So the searching is a part of the genes there

LF:

Maybe, that's a good way of putting it.

ETZ:

Yes. We got stopped on Brahms here. After intermission, he did your piece called Waves, world premiere, and then the Schoenberg Chamber Symphony, the full orchestra version. That's an interesting...

LF:

Yes, interesting program. Not typical for Carvalho, but interesting.

ETZ:

I see the orchestra here, it looks like quite a lot of fine New York freelance musicians.

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Oh, Matthew Romon was the concert master.

LF:

Yeah, I withdrew that piece. I didn't like the piece so I withdrew it. That sometimes happens.

ETZ:

Oh yes, oh yes.

LF:

More recently I withdrew a piece called Embros, I don't know if it's ever been done in Carnegie Hall, it's possible.

ETZ:

Yeah, I don't, we don't have…

LF:

Embros, a piece for a few musicians of different choice. They can be different kinds for different performances, but I didn't like that one, so I withdrew that.

ETZ:

mm-hmm. That's, I know that feeling. It's…

LF:

And I later on used the theme of Embros for the theme of the last movement of my Left Hand Concerto, I wrote for Leon Fleisher.

ETZ:

Oh really?

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

So it wasn't a total loss. [laughs]

LF:

No, I liked that theme.

ETZ:

I also think that, I mean, it seems to me that, that speaking of Brahms, that Brahms was one of the few composers that when he revised something actually improved it. And there's a, I don't know if you've ever looked at the early B-major Piano Trio compared to the later one. And the later one is so…

LF:

It's much better, huh?

ETZ:

…oh, it's much better, it has all the wonderful material of the first one.

LF:

I don't. I don't know the first version.

ETZ:

It's just full of fugatos, and he sort of showed everything he knew how to do, and then he really sort of simplified…

LF:

Well I should…

ETZ:

…and a sort of spontaneous.

LF:

…I should hope that when a composer revises a piece that he makes it better, not worse. I mean, why revise it?

ETZ:

Well, I think a lot of times, it's a very difficult thing to do.

LF:

It's true. Well I think Beethoven's Leonore 3 is better than Leonore 2, but Robert Schumann preferred Leonore 2

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

So… [laughs]

ETZ:

One thinks of Hindemith works for instance, would not be improved by his later philosophy.

LF:

Uh huh. That's interesting.

ETZ:

And I don't know, anyway, I can understand withdrawing rather than revising.

LF:

[laughs]

ETZ:

Now we have...so far we haven't talked at all about chamber music, and you're certainly well known as a chamber musician, as well as a composer.

LF:

Well Embros was a chamber piece, yes. I've written a lot of chamber music, you're absolutely right.

ETZ:

And one of the things we have, we have, in fact we have a photo that seems to be properly dated 1983. This is Lukas in 1983 and that was the year that the Da Capo chamber players did a concert of your music.

LF:

What did I, what piece was that?

ETZ:

Music. I think they did a whole concert. I will have it right here. It says here, here we go. No, this is, this is just solo, because that is a different concert.

LF:

I believe that the last time I played chamber music in Carnegie Hall, I will always remember because it was the first time that the hall had changed. That was the first time I got to play in the new hall, the new Carnegie Hall. So I remember that one, and that was my piece Tashi.

ETZ:

Yeah, that a little bit later. That's in 1987. Here's the program '83. Yes, Da Capo Chamber Players did Two Early Pieces for Violin and Piano, "Early Song" and "Composer's Holiday," and Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird.

LF:

Uh huh.

ETZ:

With Rosemarie Fraeny.

LF:

Oh yes.

ETZ:

Any relation to Marrella?

LF:

No Rosemarie Fraeny was a singer at City Opera Company.

ETZ:

mm-hmm. And then at the end of the program, they did Time Cycle.

LF:

Oh, so it was all my music, huh.

ETZ:

Yes, there was a small piece by Aaron Copland and Louise Talma, and Leonard Bernstein wrote an Anniversary for Lukas Foss, and the Stravinsky Three Pieces for Clarinet.

LF:

All friends.

ETZ:

But this was obviously a tribute to you…

LF:

Yes.

ETZ:

In fact, it says, “With a tribute by Aaron Copland” So, I don’t…

LF:

How wonderful.

ETZ:

…I don’t know if he spoke or, um, that was in ’83, in this era. I didn’t show this picture which I think is a very, very nice picture of you from 1968. This is the time of the Baroque Variations that we were talking about.

LF:

I think that’s such a nice, nice photograph.

ETZ:

While Nick was changing his cassette we were talking about Brahms a little bit more and you had a story you wanted to tell.

LF:

Yes. What happened was, when I was in my first year a conductor of the Buffalo Philharmonic, I was asked to do the Brahms’s Requiem which I was happy to do. And I conducted it, and at rehearsal I decided, “What a shame that Brahms goes from the fugue where everybody yells out their voices straight in to the beautiful choral tune of the last movement. Why didn’t he give a rest to the voice and have an interlude?” So I thought, “Well, I could do an interlude with Brahms’s notes. I’ll just help myself to Brahms’s notes from the beginning or from somewhere towards the beginning, and orchestrate it for distant violins like a dream, like a reminiscence. It would be very beautiful.” And I did that, and that’s the way I conducted it. And that night I get back to my hotel and I find a note in my box. And the note said, “What you did to my Requiem made me turn around in my grave. Signed, Johannes Brahms.” I turned to the hotel clerk and I said, “Tell me, who brought that note.” “I don’t know, was a little fat man with a beard.”

ETZ:

[laughs]

LF:

To this day I do not know who wrote that note. Was it Brahms?

ETZ:

That's a, that's a cute story. [laughter] Oh, and I was telling you that I knew Ernst von Dohnanyi very well during the last few years of his life, played chamber music with him, played violin in his conducting class. He had some very interesting insights, based on his actually knowing Brahms, as a young man. For instance how Brahms often starts the development section with the first subject…

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

…and then goes away, and apparently Brahms had told Dohnanyi that, that was a kind of a nod to the tradition of repeating the exposition, which of course he no longer wanted to do. And just certain little things like that…

LF:

Wonderful.

ETZ:

…that sort of get filtered from one musician to another.

LF:

That's a very interesting statement.

ETZ:

Yes it is, and it seems to me that you were talking about the being a prisoner of the page. And this is something I feel with performers all the time that you want people to be liberated from the notes on the page and get to the essence of music. I can understand the Rostropovich story very well. I mean to have the music internalized so it's not something

that one is reading, but it's something that one is emitting. And it seems to me that we have an odd combination of a written and an oral tradition. That so much depends on the example of a teacher, and the performances that one hears, how things get turned into a tradition. And it's a very hands-on kind of personal, one person to another, experience rather than something written in stone and handed down. Excuse me…

LF:

Yeah. that's very well said.

ETZ:

We have a program from the Baroque Variations that's very interesting. This is you conducting the Buffalo Philharmonic in 1968. And you were doing Re-ak for large orchestra by Isang Yun…

LF:

Oh yeah.

ETZ:

…Calcium Light Night by Ives, a work I like a lot.

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Nice, nice piece.

LF:

Yeah, Ives was very important in my life. I mean that was my last influence maybe, the "Ivesian" influence.

ETZ:

And can you…?

LF:

And when I discovered him I got very excited about the idea of the polyphony of musics. Not just different parts, but different musics going on at once that I thought was

fascinating. But what I really loved about Ives was that he was two things that really nobody else combined; innovative and childlike. You know, where else do you find that combination.

ETZ:

And there's a little bit of a, a bad boy in him too, you know with a…

LF:

Exactly.

ETZ:

not, a well-behaved child…

LF:

No, like me.

ETZ:

…but a little. Yes, perhaps. [laughter]

LF:

Exactly. Naughty.

ETZ:

Now I didn't say you were naughty, you said you were naughty.

LF:

I am. [laugher] Still am.

ETZ:

Anyway after the Ives you did your Baroque Variations. This is described as the first complete New York performance. And maybe Nick, you can get this program, because it specifies, "These are variations on…" And the Bach that, that's [sings part from E major partita]

LF:

That's right. The E Major. The E Major Partita.

ETZ:

That's the part that gave you the trouble.

LF:

That's right.

ETZ:

The orchestra the trouble.

LF:

That's the, it's called Phorion, Phorion is Greek for stolen goods.

ETZ:

[laughs]

LF:

Because all the notes in it are derived from Bach. Even the glissandos go from the, from the, let's say the first note to the last note of the bar or something like that. Everything is derived from that. It's not a variation, it's really, it's composing with…

ETZ:

A recomposition

LF:

A destructuring or whatever you want to call it. Deconstructing.

ETZ:

I read somewhere where you had a, a dream or an image of…

LF:

That's right.

ETZ:

…sixteenth notes being, coming apart …

LF:

Washing on the shore.

ETZ:

…and washing up on the shore.

LF:

That was the vision. The dream vision that prompted the piece.

ETZ:

That's a very clear statement of that, I think.

LF:

Yeah. It's exciting.

ETZ:

Then you, after intermission, you did Babbitt's Correspondences for Strings and Tape, world premiere. And Penderecki's Capriccio for Violin and Orchestra. So you did a concert of, well it's even described as a Gala Festival of New York Premieres, including a world premiere. That's a wonderfully adventurous program. How long did you stay in Buffalo?

LF:

7 years.

ETZ:

This is from '68

LF:

7 years as music director, but I still go back occasionally as guest conductor or conductor laureate or whatever you want to call it. But I was 7 years music director.

ETZ:

I hear very good thing about the orchestra. They did my...they were one of the co-commissioners of the Trumpet Concerto I wrote for Doc Severinsen.

LF:

Oh good, they did your Trumpet Concerto.

ETZ:

Yeah, American Concerto.

LF:

I still haven't heard that, I want to hear it somewhere. I bet you can write better for the trumpet than anybody.

ETZ:

Well, I mean, it's a very interesting thing to write for an instrument that you play somewhat. I mean, as you say about improvisation, you don't want to be constrained by your technique.

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

It seems to me we're always trying to make a virtue out of what we know and what we don't know, and try to…

LF:

That's good, I make a virtue out of what I don't know, good.

ETZ:

[laughs]

LF:

That's a new one. I will remember that.

ETZ:

But it's true, I think, I feel that way, that there's so much that one doesn't know and to make that a plus rather than a deficit, and not to take what you know about an instrument as a limitation. So that you can only write, I mean, I'd hate to write a…

LF:

So when do I get to hear your Trumpet Concerto.

ETZ:

Oh, I, I'll send you a tape.

LF:

Love that. [break in tape]

LF:

God, if every interviewer would know as much about the subject as you do.

ETZ:

right.

LF:

What a difference we would have in journalism.

ETZ:

Well, I could never be a journalist so…

LF:

[laughs]

ETZ:

Here's a, the world premiere of your, no I'm sorry the New York premiere of your work called Tashi, for Tashi.

LF:

That's right, that's what I remember.

ETZ:

Richard Stoltzman, Ida Kavafian, Ted Arm, Steve Tenenbaum, Fred Sherry.

LF:

I remember different acoustic suddenly in Carnegie Hall, you know. At least from the stage.

ETZ:

Well this is the opening of the…this is the new season.

LF:

Yeah. Yeah. It was very interesting.

ETZ:

Yes, I think I had, my piano concerto was done here just after the renovation. You weren't playing, I don't know why I have the idea.

LF:

I wasn't playing Tashi.

ETZ:

Oh you were playing?

LF:

Yeah, Tashi I was playing, but maybe not the rest of the program,…

ETZ:

No, no. No.

LF:

…but Tashi I played.

ETZ:

Ok, because it doesn't say.

LF:

They insisted. I had to play my own piano part.

ETZ:

That's a nice group of people.

LF:

Wonderful, I love them.

ETZ:

Really flexible, interesting.

LF:

I love them, yes. I wrote it for them.

ETZ:

Do you want to...does the title have any meaning to you, other than their group.

LF:

No, not to me. It was just the group.

ETZ:

Yeah. It, ok, just curious. You and Stoltzman have collaborated quite a bit, I would say.

LF:

Ever since Tashi, yes, we became real friends. And I turned my piece Tashi into a concerto, in to violin concerto, which he premiered.

ETZ:

mm-hmm. With whom, do you remember.

LF:

I think it was Los Angeles and Los Angeles Philharmonic, and then he also did it elsewhere, he did it with me somewhere. I think, Brooklyn. But we don't, we didn't do it in Carnegie.

ETZ:

mm-hmm.

LF:

Unfortunately.

ETZ:

Yet.

LF:

Not yet.

ETZ:

Yes. [laughs]

LF:

He plays it beautifully.

ETZ:

Oh, I'll bet he does. He's a wonderful player. Oh actually, I think we have a picture of you and some of the Tashi people here somewhere.

LF:

Oh that's right.

ETZ:

Don't we have that?

LF:

I brought it. I brought the picture. Oh, but that's Tashi and Michael Tilson Thomas.

ETZ:

Here we go, here's, here's…

LF:

Is that Stoltzman and Michael Tilson Thomas.

ETZ:

Yes, Lukas and Richard Stoltzman and Michael Tilson Thomas.

LF:

So it's not the Tashi group, no?

ETZ:

No, it's not, I thought we had one of Tashi but…Now was this was, was he playing your concerto with, perhaps with Tilson Thomas?

LF:

Is that's what, when it was? It's very possible.

ETZ:

I have no idea, it looks fairly recent on all accounts.

LF:

It's very possible.

LF:

Maybe that's when it was. I'm not sure, but that could very well be.

ETZ:

That's a nice, nice picture. We have a Yaddo program. Yaddo and Curtis. With your Capriccio for Cello and…

LF:

Oh, that was a benefit for Curtis…

ETZ:

Curtis and Yaddo, yes.

LF:

For my school, yes.

ETZ:

Did you go to Yaddo?

LF:

Never.

ETZ:

Or MacDowell

LF:

MacDowell Colony, Yes.

ETZ:

Yes.

LF:

But Yaddo, not yet. Maybe I will, maybe. They want me to come there.

ETZ:

Yes.

LF:

Very sweet about that. They really want me to come.

ETZ:

I haven't been there either, but I've been to MacDowell and I found that lovely. Which studio did you have, do you know?

LF:

I had different ones at different years, but the one I liked was the first one. What was it called? If you have a name for it I can probably identify it.

ETZ:

How far was it from the dining room? [laughs]

LF:

Far.

ETZ:

Far. Maybe it was the MacDowell studio.

LF:

Yeah, that's the one.

ETZ:

With the big piano?

LF:

Yeah, yeah.

ETZ:

Big terrible piano.

LF:

I think that was the one.

ETZ:

It was in the woods and had a nice little porch.

LF:

That's right.

ETZ:

I had that one too.

LF:

Oh those were such exciting days, I wrote a lot of music there.

ETZ:

Yeah, do you remember when you were there which years, or which pieces we've talked about you worked on there.

LF:

I know The Prairie was already written, so.

ETZ:

you must have written The Prairie when you were very young.

LF:

19, was when I began it, at age 19.

ETZ:

19

LF:

But I was at the MacDowell colony earlier than that, I think. I was at the MacDowell Colony already, age 17.

ETZ:

Oh really!

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

And you found out about this through the…

LF:

Maybe I wrote part of The Prairie there, maybe I did write part of The Prairie there.

ETZ:

…this circle of composers that you knew, Copland.

LF:

Well Joseph Machlis was there. He's not a composer, but he was there.

ETZ:

He was?

LF:

Yes, we became friends in other words when I was 17.

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

Louise Talma was there.

ETZ:

Yeah, well Louise…

LF:

And she was my dear friend, yes.

ETZ:

…always, always goes there.

LF:

Still is.

ETZ:

Yeah. it's interesting that there are these places that offer kind of a hospitable environment for an artist, not just the time alone, but the interaction with the other people who are there, the writers, the painters, and...

LF:

Yeah, it was fun.

ETZ:

Yeah. I enjoyed it very much too, myself.

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Ok, did you say we have a very recent program, one that's not even on the list.

Cameraman:

It's from just a few weeks ago.
[TAPE BREAK]

ETZ:

It's 1996 we're really coming up to the…

LF:

Weill Hall.

ETZ:

…Richard Stoltzman clarinet, Lukas Foss piano, American connection.

LF:

Yeah, I don't do this kind of recital except with Stoltzman.

ETZ:

Yeah. Well you know it's funny that it, it's a shame that the recital has kind of lost in panache. I think it's a wonderful…

LF:

That's true. And it…

ETZ:

…a wonderful way to hear music.

LF:

…and it was a wonderful program because it was all friends of mine.

ETZ:

Gershwin, Three Preludes.

LF:

Oh no, I shouldn't say that. That's totally untrue. Gershwin and I never met.

ETZ:

Copland, Piano Blues.

LF:

Copland I played and enjoyed.

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

Playing, of course. He was a great friend.

ETZ:

You could have known Gershwin, you were just in different circles.

LF:

No, no. He died the year I came to America. I couldn't have known him.

ETZ:

Ok.

LF:

And also we did Ives and I never got to know Ives. So, that statement was wrong.

ETZ:

Well, all composers you feel close to.

LF:

Otherwise Steve Reich…

ETZ:

And it includes Steve Reich.

LF:

…Steve Reich I know well. In fact he took a few of lessons from me in Ojai, California, way back…

ETZ:

Oh really.

LF:

…when I was conductor, director, was music director of that festival.

ETZ:

Have you done much teaching in your, uh, career?

LF:

Oh yeah, a lot.

ETZ:

And do you like to do this or is it something you're…

LF:

It keeps me young. yeah it's nice to, you have to ask yourself questions all the time in teaching.

ETZ:

Yes, yes, yeah.

LF:

It's very nice, I enjoy it. I still enjoy it.

ETZ:

Well something keeps you young so that's a…

LF:

[laughs]

ETZ:

And you also, there's this, the Hindemith Kleines Rondo. The Clarinet Sonata…

LF:

And Bernstein. The Clarinet Sonata

ETZ:

That's a nice piece, the Bernstein Piano and Clarinet Sonata. Didn't he write that a Tanglewood.

LF:

Well I only know that he wrote it when he was about what, 22?

ETZ:

Yeah, I just, I haven't heard it for many years, but I just sort of had the memory of…

LF:

Was that his first published piece? I'm not sure.

ETZ:

I think it might have been.

LF:

mm-hmm.

ETZ:

I don't see, the notes say but, that's a nice, a very, very early work. Well we've basically covered the, the material we have here. I do want to add this, I have a postcard from…

LF:

From whom is it?

ETZ:

…from Rodzinsky 1945.

LF:

From, from Rodzinsky?

ETZ:

Yes, from 1945.

LF:

Oh great.

ETZ:

and from Stockbridge, Massachusetts. And this, again, this about what he looked like at this time. I wonder you know what the future will, archivist will do with the messages that get left on answering machines, as opposed to the little notes that people use to write one another. It's nice to have those.

LF:

I'm so glad.

ETZ:

Today, you know, they call and never leave a message.

LF:

Exactly. Those days are over, besides, the days when we composers all wrote letters to each other, I mean we were like a club, the ivory tower.

ETZ:

mm-hmm.

LF:

We were like a club, and now, each one for himself.

ETZ:

Do you think, I guess I'm interested in the ways in which you think the music world has changed. And you've already mentioned that you, what you described, as when you came to this country it sounds like you were embraced by a circle of people who were open to a new person coming in, and where there was a sense of, I don't know, noblesse in a way. It's sort of the conductors looking to see who the new people were and composers helping one another out. Do you that's because this was around the time of...what do you think is, the reason for this?

LF:

It could have something to do with the media that nowadays composers think if they're not on television they don't exist. And they hire publicity agents. I can't imagine Bartok or Stravinsky hiring a publicity agent, or Hindemith. Inconceivable.

ETZ:

Did you know Bartok?

LF:

Because, it was just doesn't work… Yes, I knew Bartok too.

ETZ:

That's a very interesting mind. Did you ever play with him, or…

LF:

No, we never played together, we never made music together, but I knew him because when I went to see Fritz Reiner to play him my Symphony No. 1, to play that for him, he was no longer my teacher, but he's still my teacher. I bicycled out to Westport Connecticut, the door opened and there was Bela Bartok with Reiner. I couldn't believe my eyes, I thought, "Great! I get to play my symphony, not only for Reiner, but for Bartok." We had lunch and I said, "Mr. Bartok, why do you teach piano? Why don't you teach composition?" He said, "Because composition very private with me, when you play your symphony for Mr. Reiner I will walk in the garden."

ETZ:

Aww. [laughter]

LF:

But then we took the train together back to New York and had a wonderful conversation. And then a few years later there was a premiere with Koussevitzky of the Concerto for Orchestra and since there was no piano part I didn't have to be at the piano. I sat with Bartok and looked at the score. And when we got to the last bar I said, "But Mr. Bartok it finishes in the wrong key." "No. You're listening with major, minor ears. You need to listen modally." I said, "Yes, but why not suspend it. It doesn't seem, it doesn't seem to work." I was so arrogant. I made a statement like that to Bela Bartok, can you imagine?

ETZ:

Well.

LF:

Well he said, "Listen again." But a year later he published the new ending, which everybody does. The old ending is still in as an annex in some, in the original publisher score.

ETZ:

mm-hmm. That's very interesting. that's…

LF:

I don't know if I had anything to do with it, but anyway he did publish another ending and that's the one we all know.

ETZ:

Very, very interesting. He's someone that I've always thought must have been a wonderful man, you know…

LF:

Oh, he was wonderful.

ETZ:

…as well as a composer.

LF:

The list time I saw him, it was after he had a stroke and it was the most scary picture because I remember Bartok had the most wonderful blue eyes, the most blue, blue eyes imaginable. And after the stroke they were white, as if he had sent his eyes to the laundry and all the color had gone out. Bartok with white eyes, it was like a ghost. That was the last time I saw him.

ETZ:

Wow. Now when he came to this country people tried to help him, I know, and Reiner managed to get together that commission for the Concerto for Orchestra.

LF:

Right.

ETZ:

Do you feel that, in the way in which American composers welcomed everyone from Europe and they became our teachers, and our teachers' teachers, and all of those just became part of the mix. Do you think that, was there a competition between say the home grown composers, who were around at that time and the people who were coming in, like Bartok and Hindemith, Stravinsky and Shoenberg?

LF:

It's an interesting point. I don't think there was competition. It depends on the composers. There are some composers who are very competitive. And they may have felt that way,

but I was never aware of that. I mean, sure in Los Angeles there was Schoenberg and there was Stravinsky, maybe they were competitive, but I wasn't aware of it.

ETZ:

mm-hmm. Because you mentioned, you feel today it's much more competitive…

LF:

Yeah, today it is more.

ETZ:

You know, each person for himself, and I'm just wondering you know, it's how, why you, what you would think has happened to the music world to make this change that you feel is there.

LF:

Well you know, competitive, maybe, we always were, but we were at the same time friends. Yeah, friends can be competitors.

ETZ:

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

LF:

Now we're competitive without being friends. That's the difference. It's almost like a wall has descended.

ETZ:

Is it perhaps that the, I mean this world that we're talking about in the 40s and 50s. The New York Philharmonic was certainly a focus of a lot of music that was happening in this country. The Boston Symphony was a focus. That there were kind of magnet, places and people were drawn together and, I don't know, maybe like birds flocking or something, and the feeling of camaraderie. I would say I have some composers who are very good friends, close friends. But the world seems very different from the days I hear about in the 40s, let's say.

LF:

And are your friends really invested in your work or in their own work?

ETZ:

I would have to say honestly probably their own work, yeah.

LF:

That's, yeah, well that's where the difference lies, in the old days after concerts we would all gather in the Russian Tea Room or wherever and talk about the music we just heard.

ETZ:

mm-hmm.

LF:

Nowadays colleagues just pat you on the back or say, "Nice piece," or "Very Interesting," and that's it.

ETZ:

Yeah, very interesting and sort of awful.

LF:

There's no real communication anymore. I can give you an example, when I discovered that pile of letters that I wrote. When I discovered that, I had 10 letters from Stockhausen, 10 from Boulez, and from Xenakis, and from everyone. I got very depressed because I'm not in touch with those people much anymore, now and then by chance, but no letters, no exchange. And I remember writing a letter to Xenakis and to Takemitsu, "What happened, why aren't we in touch anymore like we used to?" And I got a nice one sentence letter back from Xenakis, "Dear Lukas, I love you." [laughter] That was it. No response from Takemitsu, but strange enough an invitation to conduct in Tokyo came by him, and so two different responses to my question, "What happened?" [laughter]

ETZ:

Well, I suppose some of that is natural, I mean when you're quite young and hanging out with people…

LF:

Maybe that's it, but it was a club.

ETZ:

…and it's different as you get older, and…

LF:

We wrote for each other in those days.

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

Now we don't write for each other. And there is something wrong with writing for each other because it's like a club. You know we should write for everybody, shouldn't just write for each other. But we traded that mistake for maybe a worse mistake, which is not to have that communication at all. To just write whatever is trendy, which is much worse.

ETZ:

Yeah, do you feel that, let's say in the 40s and ever further, there was a tremendous pressure to, a stylistic pressure. I should say technical rather than style. I like your definition of the difference between style and technique. A pressure, particularly when Stravinsky began to write some twelve-tone music, was there a lot of… Do you feel that part of being in a group was having allegiance to something or was it just honest open, open-minded appreciation of others' work?

LF:

I think it was appreciation of each others work at the same time there was pressure. Certainly the twelve-tone school exerted enormous pressure somehow. Boulez felt that if you didn't write twelve-tone music you weren't with it. You were somewhere behind. Whether he still feels that way, I have no idea. But at that time that was the general feeling. Milton Babbitt, I think felt the same way. And…

ETZ:

That this was historical necessity and that…

LF:

Yeah, I never belonged to a school. I wrote twelve-tone music when it was no longer necessary to write twelve-tone music. I wrote aleatoric music before the word aelas came into being. So I never belonged to any trend. And I think the danger of being trendy is, if you're trendy you're really not with it in the right way. You're a bandwagon jumper….

ETZ:

You're following.

LF:

…a follower and that's not healthy.

ETZ:

What is it that Hindemith said about you, "He wants to learn but not to follow."

LF:

That's right.

ETZ:

That's…I would want that as my, on my, as my epitaph, if I were you. Paul Hindemith….

LF:

Ok, I'll put it on my tombstone.

ETZ:

That's a wonderful, wonderful remark. On the other hand it implies that there was a sense of pressure to have allegiance to something or other. I don't, I never felt this myself, either, and I haven't quite figured out whether it was…

LF:

Do you teach?

ETZ:

Not really, no.

LF:

Not really, no.

ETZ:

I…

LF:

Some teachers are like gurus. They expect the student to take their world and make it their own. Which I can understand, but I must say, I've never been too fond of the guru type. I'm the opposite type of teacher.

ETZ:

Sessions used to say that he thought that he wrote Sessions music better than anybody and that he didn't want anybody to try. [laughter] I thought that was a nice way of putting it.

LF:

I'm sure he was right. That's very good.

ETZ:

But it's…we live in a very interesting time, I mean, when you think of the changes that have taken place in your lifetime, the explosion of the media and even in the, how did you come to this country, you came by boat, probably.

LF:

By boat.

ETZ:

That would have…

LF:

Queen Mary.

ETZ:

Queen Mary?

LF:

Queen Mary? The Queen Elizabeth, what, was it? Queen Mary, I think.

ETZ:

Probably it was…

LF:

Queen Mary.

ETZ:

She's out in Long Beach California now, I was ...

LF:

Yeah, by boat.

ETZ:

Still a Grande Dame. The world must have been just so different in the days when to come from Europe to the States it took, what, six days, seven days?

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

As opposed to today when people fly all over the world and conductors sort of I think, by necessity had to sort of stay in one place for a period of time. They weren't able to be in Amsterdam one night and New York the next, and Tokyo.

LF:

Which is probably a good thing. I think conductors do too much traveling. First of all, they always travel with the same repertory and do the same repertory everywhere, and it becomes a recipe, it become formulaic. And I don't believe in that. Koussevitzky was right to stay put in Boston and make the most of his orchestra.

ETZ:

Yeah, I think that very, very true that that's…they have not found a substitute for the really resident conductor. Also when you think of even traveling back and forth to Europe,

a sea voyage of about a week is certainly a wonderful time to learn some new scores, or to…

LF:

That's right.

ETZ:

…look at some new things. Where as today one, I actually heard an administrator say of the conductor he works for that he shouldn't have to know new things and performers and that he's too busy and its his job as the manager to filter all of this through. Well but that, that may work administratively but it takes away the, the impulse of the conductor who hears…

LF:

Yeah, spontaneity.

ETZ:

…someone else doing the young composers piece, as in your Prairie, with Rodzinsky hearing the Shaw performance and wanting to do it himself and the notion of the connection of the conductor of the 90s to what's actually going on. It's a different, I think it's a different relationship.

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Have you noticed any other things that have changed over the years. Do you think that the world is more or less composer friendly?

LF:

The world is success friendly. So, if the composer is successful they're friendly. That's not very idealistic, is it?

ETZ:

You mean on the world's part or on your part?

LF:

Yeah, on the world's part.

ETZ:

No, I, it's not.

LF:

No it's not great. But we survive, we composers.

ETZ:

Yes, I also feel this way that sometimes we can also be, overwhelmed by the sort of contemporary notion that if it doesn't happen in Yankee Stadium, it doesn't happen. Really the history of all of the arts are often the history of a small number of people in a tiny place. And it doesn't have to be a mass sort of thing. I find that I have probably of my most productive relationships with performers, we get to know one another over the years and there's a real genuine music making going on there. And it may or may not attract the most attention but it seems to me that there are some very good avenues if we don't fall prey to the idea that everything has to be, you know, sort of like the mega hit, and the mega success.

LF:

That's right we have to understand that, whether something is successful or not doesn't mean that it's good. And, that the great composers were misfits very often. Take Charles Ives for instance, who had no success whatsoever during his except the very end of his life when was no longer composing he became a legend.

ETZ:

Yes.

LF:

But, here is a great business man, he was a business man during his day, who refused to take out a copyright on his music because, as he said, "My music belongs to the American people, and they couldn't care less." I mean, to be a misfit like that is unthinkable today.

ETZ:

Well, but some people cared very much. I remember playing the fourth symphony. I was in the American Symphony the year after Stokowski did the premiere.

LF:

Yeah, well that's when the legend began.

ETZ:

But we had parts that, I don't know, they were just in terrible shape, but somebody had very painstakingly put them together and we were all, I mean, in the orchestra working on trying to figure out, what is this, and what is that.

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Trying to help…

LF:

Yeah, well that's when, that's when he became famous, but I mean to say before he became famous he didn't take out a copyright on his music. I think that's unusual, especially for a businessman.

ETZ:

Yes, it is.

LF:

Very idealistic.

ETZ:

Or realistic. I don't know which. [laughter]

LF:

I know what you mean.

ETZ:

It's...someone I know once was doing a concert of contemporary music in a small venue and, by mistake, his home telephone number was put in the ad and when he saw it he was very upset, but then nobody called so he was even more upset.

LF:

Even more upset

ETZ:

Yeah. [laughter] So one doesn't know whether he figured there wasn't… Well, at any rate. I think sometimes also when we look at history it seems to me that we see it as we see the history of our own lives. Well of course, this led to this and this led to that. But at the moment it may have looked very bewildering and nobody knew what was going to happen next. And sometimes it seems like pieces have a history that's very different from their present, and that possibility is always there for a composer.

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

I mean I don't think that...do you think of posterity? Do you think of…

LF:

I never do, no, I think that would be grandiose. I don't like to think that way.

ETZ:

Yeah, I don't either. A lot of people do though. And they…

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

I know you don't because I have seen some of your archives and you're, if there's anybody who's worse than me it's got to be you. In terms of writing down when something happened and all of this and keeping everything in order for the chroniclers because…

LF:

Yeah, it's bad business because archives are valuable. One should. One should think that way, but I always thought of music as work…

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

…not as a career. Just work. Something I do because I'm not good at anything else. That's why I'm doing it.

ETZ:

I think you, you must do it because you love it too.

LF:

Naturally yes, love is the…that's the real motivating factor is love. That's what I'd always tell my students. You've got to write music you love and you got to, otherwise it's pointless.

ETZ:

Yes, I couldn't agree more with that.

LF:

And the same is true with conducting. If I don't conduct, if I don't love a piece I conduct, I can at best do an efficient job.

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

But it won't be a great job. I've got to love it. And also, if I love I'll do it differently every time. I make new discoveries.

ETZ:

Oh yes.

LF:

When I, when I begin to conduct something exactly the same way I conducted it last time, I feel I've lost it. I'm not really in it.

ETZ:

Oh, I agree with that so whole-heartedly and it seems to me that that's, I would say, my greatest luxury, as a composer is having this kind of relationship with performers where they've done something enough that it becomes their piece.

LF:

Exactly. Right.

ETZ:

It becomes the little freedoms that one takes. It lives and breathes.

LF:

Also, as a composer, when you change your mind, you change your mind because you've had an idea. So that's a great moment, when you change your mind. As a conductor I've got to be careful, because when I change my mind and say, "Oh, let's not do it this way. Let's do it the other way," they think this guy doesn't know what he's doing.

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

So I have to be careful, but actually a change of mind is a very, very important element in your life, because you don't change your mind unless you've had an idea. Yet, changes of mind often meant negatively, you know. People think it's a bad thing.

ETZ:

Well there was a period when there was a lot of talk about fidelity to the score. Some of it came from people like Toscanini who it didn't seem, in the recordings I've heard, to have any particular, actually fidelity to the scores, but he talked about it and there was a whole period where composers, you know, really talked about wanting things exactly the way they wrote them. And they were willing to go to electronic instruments to make sure they had total control. And I think of music as something much more wild and wonderful than that. That it's...I don't want to hear somebody play a piece the same way twice.

LF:

Well we have to realize that notation doesn't pin point an exact interpretation anyway. We have to interpret the notation. And we can make all kinds of discoveries by doing that…

ETZ:

Stokowski used to say that he would hold up a score and he would say that this is just, you know, black marks on white paper and…
[break in tape]

ETZ:

I think we represent a whole new thing in this country. And that is the fact that we come to music from such different places. We all have remarkably different backgrounds...

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

...to end up sort of in the same square.

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

And the notion that each composer has a particular vision. We don't even have a way to talk about it. We don't have words that correspond to the oral world.

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

But I think it's a, to me a very exciting trend that it's not this sort of pluralism like everything is like everything else and just as good but the notion that you have all these different voices…

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

…and they have a different, they have a different quality and they have, they bring a different experience to music and music means different things to, strikingly different things to different people.

LF:

You're right.

ETZ:

But we were talking about the notated score being a relatively primitive instrument and I was just saying that Stokowski used to in rehearsal hold up a score and say, "This is just black notes on, on white paper," and we have to, you know, give it life. And he took of course a great deal of freedom, even in, as you know, orchestrating things. Not just the…

LF:

Yeah. A little bit.

ETZ:

I mean, he would reorchestrate Wagner and, you know, lean over and say "Violas double the cellos," and things like this.

LF:

Yeah, I wouldn't want performers to do that.

ETZ:

No I wouldn't either, but it's remarkable that Stokowski's kind of freedom and his ideas of, have enjoyed a resurgence which leads us to this whole topic of going in and out of favor and…

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

…the process of making a life as a composer or as an artist in our society and, I just wondered what your experience has been in this regard. You, you certainly started off with an incredible bang, you know, at the top.

LF:

Well, I have very strong feelings for instance about trendiness about things like performing things in the style of the, what is the word for it again? I can't think of the style of the time, what's it called?

ETZ:

The period practice, you mean.

LF:

Yeah. the period practices…

ETZ:

there's a word that…

LF:

…there's a word that's escaping me right now. Performance practice of the time…

ETZ:

It's…yeah, I know what you mean, I can't think of it either.

LF:

Yeah, which I've discovered is a very dangerous thing.

ETZ:

Historically informed performance.

LF:

Yeah, that's very dangerous too. One should know those things. We should all know it, but we should not necessarily imitate the practice of the time because the practice of the

time is really for mediocre music. To make something, let's say a renaissance piece, to make it sound a little more interesting add a lot of ornaments, you get a little spice. But with good food, you don't want a lot of spice. You want to do it right, and the way it is. So to add ornaments to Bach is totally wrong. So practice of the time is always based on, I think, the mediocre making it more effective.

ETZ:

Well that, that's a very interesting observation, because so many of the rules of harmony for instance, that come from that period don't really apply to Bach.

LF:

No.

ETZ:

And you can always make a…I mean, I shouldn't say anything negative about a composer, but if you really want to see a perfect example of a twelve-tone piece, you look at an example by Krenek, that is, you know, just sort of like a perfect example of a twelve-tone piece. Um, and it seems to me that, that there's, at any given time there's a lot of mediocrity that...which is why, it always, it bothers me that people think of writing music sort of to exemplify a style.

LF:

Bothers me too. I get very upset about that, think it's complete nonsense.

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

Imitating a style is not going to help any composer.

ETZ:

Do you feel…do you have a kind of picture of the music world since you've become aware of the ebbs and flows and changes that have occurred and what was considered important and…

LF:

What was considered important…

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

…as opposed to what is considered important?

ETZ:

Yes, I mean the changes that have occurred over the years.

LF:

Well…

ETZ:

Do you think perhaps Ives was not just an outsider, but was at a time when the country was not quite sophisticated enough to…

LF:

That's probably part of it and, and besides, yes he was just not, he was ahead of his time. To me The Unanswered Question is interesting because that trumpet tune is to me like he is announcing the new era.

ETZ:

Yes.

LF:

It sounds to me like the beginning of modern music is that, in that trumpet figure. Which is opposed to the…

ETZ:

…to the shimmering in the strings. Yes

LF:

…that ground of harmonies. Yeah, the major minor chords that accompany it, and suddenly you get this totally different thing held up against it. It's fascinating that's the beginning that ushers in, I think, that ushers in our new music.

ETZ:

mm-hmm.

LF:

But new music today is so many different things that I couldn't possibly even begin to define it.

ETZ:

Do you think it's necessary?

LF:

No. We don't have to define it.

ETZ:

Yeah, yeah. Um…

LF:

But take for instance minimal music. Now minimal music I remember conducting once a piece of minimal music and on the same program was a piece by Stravinsky which I loved. And the minimal piece I liked because it made me feel good while I conducted it. But when it was over I was as miserable as I was before, which is very much like a drug experience, you know. When you are on the drug you feel good, when the drug wears off you feel terrible so, in other words I thought, "Well, you know, if that's what minimal music is about then, well that's wrong," because life is minimal in a sense. Everyday is the same. We get up in the morning, we have breakfast and so forth, everything is the same, but slowly we get carried on towards death or transfiguration or whatever it is. And that one could write a piece of music that is minimal and at the same time slowly moves towards something else like life, not like a drug but like life. And that idea influenced certain pieces of mine.

ETZ:

It's a wonderful notion.

LF:

I think when, in other words, all of these ideas, you know, you have to take them with a grain of salt and rethink them and make them your own in a different way.

ETZ:

Would you hear minimalism in a historical context?

LF:

You can call Vivaldi the first minimal composer.
[Both laugh]

ETZ:

That's not what I had in mind, but that's an interesting thought.

LF:

I don't know what you meant.

ETZ:

Well, in the sense that a rejection of a certain world, a music world view that was current when these people burst on to the scene. Although I have a little difficulty with the categories that people have. They talk about the 50s and the 60s and the 70s and there was an awful lot going on in those times also. Maybe it didn't get noticed much as, maybe one thing got noticed more than others, but it was, it was also a very diverse era.

LF:

Exactly, all those categories don't work.

ETZ:

But if somebody were composing an antidote you might say, or an answer to music they felt was overly complex or failed to make tonal centers or something. It seems to me that you could see that in a historical context. The minimalist kind of dropping the bomb shell, you might say into the scene.

LF:

Well, as long as you don't think of the technique as a style because few do, then I mean, you think, "I'm a minimalist composer," or "I am a twelve-tone composer," it's as if Bach had said I'm a fugue composer, …

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

…he wouldn't write anything but fugues. That's impoverishing your style. I think we should really make that distinction and realize that these are just techniques and the more techniques the richer is our vocabulary.

ETZ:

I think most composers resent being put in any category. I know I do.

LF:

Now they do, yes.

ETZ:

I always complain about it.

LF:

Now they do, but there used to be a time when they said, "I'm a twelve-tone composer," you know, very proudly.

ETZ:

When do you feel this was the...like in the 50s?

LF:

Yeah, the 50s that was the norm.

ETZ:

And do you want to talk about any of your colleagues or the things that were going on at that time.

LF:

I think we covered it. I don't have anything, I think anything more to say about that issue. That we haven't covered.

ETZ:

Do you think it's healthier that composers are not thinking of themselves as militantly twelve tone or militantly tonal.

LF:

Absolutely, because if they do, they couldn't, they're impoverishing themselves.

ETZ:

mm-hmm.

LF:

Now, maybe if you're primitive, you can make do with one technique. Maybe if Nancarrow only wants to write player-piano music, that's fine for a primitive. But if you are like Stravinsky, who is constantly curious about everything and incorporates it all…

LF:

You must have strong shoulders

ETZ:

[laughs] I see your arm muscles too, those are really… [laughs]

LF:

Terrific.

ETZ:

Stravinsky's a very, very interesting model isn't he, and a peculiarly 20th century model of this restlessness and the…

LF:

Yes.

ETZ:

Do you have a favorite period of Stravinsky or do you…

LF:

Well I would say the period of Story of a Soldier and Symphonies avant, in other words when he left Rimsky-Korsakov and Debussy behind, and became real pure Stravinsky, but not yet completely neoclassic.

ETZ:

Yeah, that's interesting.

LF:

But I like that period particularly.

ETZ:

Uh, it's interesting that you said, when he left Rimsky and Debussy behind, because I always felt that the ballets, rather than being something brand new, were just very much…

LF:

Absolutely.

ETZ:

…a part of that whole tradition.

LF:

That's right they were. And very Russian and very…

ETZ:

And French.

LF:

Yeah. And French, that's right

ETZ:

And...

LF:

And beautiful, I'm all for it. But, but at the same time when he became real sort of pure Stravinsky, he was even more exciting, I think.

ETZ:

It's…

Cameraman:

Sorry, I'm just having some kind of funny light. Ok, there we go.

ETZ:

Ok, and I think you would hold him up as an, an example of someone who whatever he got into, you know, whatever trouble he got into in his curiousness, he always made it, made it his.

LF:

Always, well that's the whole idea. That's why critics so often love to point out influences. But the influences anybody knows, are in everybody.

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

It's what you do to the influence. That's the important thing.

ETZ:

Yeah. Do you think about critics and music critics and criticism and what they say about you.

LF:

Well, well for a while one does naturally…

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

…after reading a review and so forth. One does think of it. But you get...I can take it as a composer, I can take criticism better than as a performer, because, as a composer the piece exists and will speak eventually for itself. As a performer, whatever the critics said happened…

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

…that's what happened.

ETZ:

That's a very interesting point.

LF:

Because it's gone.

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

The performance is gone. So, I mean, the people will read the paper and say, "I was at that concert, I though it was pretty good, but…

ETZ:

But…

LF:

…obviously I was wrong."

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

Something like that, because the printed word is the gospel. That's what it is. So there's enormous power there.

ETZ:

I was struck…someone gave me a book they were writing on Stokowski's wife. They gave me the galleys of it. And I was out somewhere at a performance and I was reading some of it on an airplane, and I was stunned at the reviews that this was Olga Samaroff.

LF:

mm-hmm.

ETZ:

The reviews in the 20s in New York. They used musical terms. They assumed familiarity with other pieces in the literature and it was quite a different…

LF:

Olga Samaroff was Koussevitzky's wife, and niece, and wife.

ETZ:

Um.

LF:

Olga Samaroff?

ETZ:

Didn't she marry Stokowski?

LF:

No she married Koussevitzky.

ETZ:

Well who am I thinking of?

LF:

Well you probably are thinking of Olga Samaroff, but she married Koussevitzky.

ETZ:

Well, I think Olga Samaroff also married Stokowski.

LF:

Well that must be a different Olga Samaroff. [laughs]

ETZ:

Must be. Well, I probably have it wrong, I'll try to…

LF:

Two Olga Samaroffs. That's very interesting.

ETZ:

…try to dig this up.

LF:

[laughs] Doesn't matter.

ETZ:

[laughs] But at any rate, she was a young pianist and went to Europe to make a reputation. But it was interesting to read these reviews. Do you think there was like a heyday of American musical criticism, like when Virgil was writing? And...

LF:

No, I think that it's actually probably better now. I can't judge that.

ETZ:

mm-hmm.

LF:

But it's a very tricky profession the profession of a critic. I mean to pass off your momentary opinion as something that's going to last. It's not easy.

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

I like reviews sometimes that are absolutely outrageous.

ETZ:

How do you mean.

LF:

I enjoy those.

ETZ:

I mean outrageous in what way?

LF:

Well, let's see, when Winthrop Sergeant of The New Yorker wrote about my Baroque Variation that what I had done Baroque Variation No. 3, the Bach one is pretty much what Duchamp did when he painted a moustache on the Mona Lisa, and subsequently Duchamp gave up art for chess. And if Mr. Foss would do likewise the whole cause of music would benefit. I thought that was great. I can just give up music and benefit the cause of music. In fact I made, when a new recording came out, I made them put that review into the, on the record jacket. And the people said, they laughed. They thought I was joking. I said, "No, not joking, I love that review. Please print it on the record jacket. I think it's very funny."

ETZ:

Well it is, and also when you think about it, most people have to work very hard to benefit…

LF:

Exactly.

ETZ:

[laughs] …the art of music, you would only have to stop. Yes, I also feel it's better to get a slap in the face than, you know, one of these, "That was interesting." Sort of…

LF:

Yeah, in between polite.

ETZ:

Reviews or comments.

LF:

Shrug off, yes.

ETZ:

Do you do much of the audience discussion today, the "meet the composer" sort of format.

LF:

I do talk quite a bit about music, but I've got to watch out. As Isaac Stern once told me that there were two ladies. One said, "I heard Isaac Stern last night." The other said, "Oh really, what did he say."

ETZ:

[laughs]

LF:

So, I better be careful not to talk too much.

ETZ:

Do you find that, would you say that audiences have changed over your career. You've certainly been in all the venues and with…

LF:

I don't think so. I think they want to be entertained. They want to learn things, some, at least the intelligent ones want to learn things. And, they're in for an experience. They hope there'll be a real experience. I don't think there's much change in an audience.

ETZ:

What kind of reaction did you have with, you know, this kind of wonderfully interesting programming that you did um, in Buffalo and in Milwaukee…

LF:

Well Buffalo sort of became a divided city. Half of it were violently against me and half was completely for me, fanatically for me. It was kind of fun.

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

I would love to return to Buffalo because, I'm, it's as if I was still around. I mean, the issues are still there and it was a lot of fun actually.

ETZ:

mm-hmm.

LF:

But then as I became conductor of the Milwaukee symphony I was a little more careful. I wouldn't force modern music on them. I would kind of introduce it in the right way and put it together with the right pieces and be a little more politically correct about it.

ETZ:

How do you mean politically correct?

LF:

Well, in other words, make sure, that I wouldn't mix things that don't go together at all. So that an audience that wants to hear, that wants to hear something very adventurous and novel would not be disappointed by the rest of the program. And an audience that wants to hear Beethoven and Mozart would not be disappointed by the rest of the program.

ETZ:

mmm. That's quite a task.

LF:

So programming can be quite a difficult an assignment, but an interesting assignment.

ETZ:

I imagine you've learned quite a bit as, having to make programs.

LF:

Yes, I find program making very interesting and very difficult. For instance, what do you put together with the Ninth Symphony. You know, you've got to find the right piece to go together. If you put the First Symphony, many conductors have done that, First and Ninth, cause it sounds interesting.

ETZ:

mm-hmm.

LF:

But actually, 10 bars of the Ninth Symphony it's like the First Symphony is wiped out.

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

It just isn't there anymore because the Ninth Symphony is so much stronger. I think it's better to juxtapose the Ninth Symphony with the Wellington's Victory Overture.

ETZ:

Oh. [laughs]

LF:

From the ridiculous to the sublime.

ETZ:

mm-hmm. That's an interesting…

LF:

Because actually the Ninth Symphony has a few ridiculous moments in it too.

ETZ:

Well I would say earthy, earthy peasant-like…

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

…moments.

LF:

That's right. So there it makes a more interesting coupling.

ETZ:

When you did the Ninth Symphony here, did you do it with Wellington's Victory?

LF:

I forgot. Because I did it differently in different places, I don't remember which I did which. I sometimes played together with Schoenberg Survivor from Warsaw.

ETZ:

Ooh! That's an interesting combination.

LF:

There are all kinds of combinations that you can put together that make for an interesting combination.

ETZ:

Yeah, I think the…are we okay?

ETZ:

…an outstanding issue. Robert, why don't you tell us what you've found?

LF:

Well…

ETZ:

How long did she remain married to Stokowski, did you say?

Robert:

Twelve Years.

ETZ:

Oh boy. [laughs]

LF:

She's a harridan...

Cameraman:

I'm a little worried that we, it may be a problem.
Assistant: We have a lot of room behind there.

ETZ:

Where were we? Do you remember?

LF:

In New York.

ETZ:

Yes
[Both laugh]

LF:

On 57th Street

ETZ:

How do you get to Carnegie Hall?

LF:

You practice.

ETZ:

Practice.
[Both laugh]

LF:

Yeah, that's a favorite of mine.

ETZ:

What are you working on now Lukas?

LF:

I am starting on an orchestra piece for Buffalo that was commissioned. And I finished an organ piece for the American Guild of Organists.

ETZ:

Oh.

LF:

And it will be done this summer here. But not at Carnegie. Some churches.

ETZ:

Since there is no organ.

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Have you written much for organ.

LF:

Well, not much but a little bit. I've written one organ piece before. And I've written, the organist part of sometimes a bigger compliment.

ETZ:

mm-hmm. Yeah. And the orchestra piece for Buffalo? Do you have…

LF:

Uh, I don't know what…

ETZ:

Do you talk about work in progress or do you prefer to…

LF:

I have nothing to say, I'm constipated.

ETZ:

Yeah. [laughs] If you were not feeling constipated, you would like to talk about a work in progress, because that's another way that we're all connected.

LF:

One shouldn't, one shouldn't talk about embryos, right?

ETZ:

Yeah, I always feel like the energy goes out of the work if you're talking about it.

LF:

Yeah, it's better to keep it for one's self

ETZ:

And besides one doesn't always know what one's doing.

LF:

Exactly.

ETZ:

And nor should you really, I think.

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Do you start with kind of a general plan or?

LF:

Not necessarily. Every work is, I start from scratch with every work. It's as if I've never composed before.

ETZ:

mmmh.

LF:

It's weird. I have no recipe. And I compose with, what is the saying, with the knowledge of the impossibility in the face of the possibility.

ETZ:

That's a very nice saying.

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Still it gets written, it's kind of amazing.

LF:

And I find that when I conduct for instance and things go well that I feel like going back to composing. I will, after a great Ninth Symphony, you know, I can do anything composing, vise versa, when composing goes well I haven't got any stage fright at all. I can do the concert in my sleep. Even if I have to play the piano I'm not worried. But if composing goes

badly then I'm really in bad shape for anything else, and vise versa—conducting goes badly it puts me back in composing. So one influences the other.

ETZ:

That's interesting. It's a, well it's coming out of your whole person. It's… do you want to talk a little bit about your relationship with Bernstein because that's a very interesting American musical story.

LF:

Well as I said, I met him at the Curtis Institute and we became good friends for the next 50 years. We were friends and never really had an argument. He is the one friend I think I had, maybe it's because we were so different in every respect, so different that we never argued.

ETZ:

That's, that's…

LF:

You know, he came to music via jazz and all that.

ETZ:

mm-hmm.

LF:

And I came to music via Bach, and Beethoven, and Mozart. And he had a totally different background, different parents from mine.

ETZ:

And a sort of a Russian ancestry…

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

…and yours is German.

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

It is, I'm sure the differences…about your longstanding relationship with Leonard Bernstein.

LF:

That's right.

ETZ:

And your, I suppose one could notice the differences but also the great similarities, I mean…

LF:

mm-hmm.

ETZ:

…the triple threat boys, you know…

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

…the composer, conductor, pianist.

LF:

You know I was wondering why I never felt for instance any envy of his incredible fame. So it's because we're so different. And I think I mean he would say such generous things to me to reporters and so forth, calling me a genius and things like that. I mean, we just think of each other as being totally different.

ETZ:

And you conducted his music and he conducted yours…

LF:

That's right.

ETZ:

…and you played his, etc…

LF:

But it was never an exchange deal, never. It just happened.

ETZ:

mm-hmm.

LF:

completely naturally. He was like an older brother. He enjoyed it when I was successful. And I enjoyed it whenever I heard a great performance. I mean, I would clap like crazy. It was wonderful. There was just never any notion of rivalry. And that is most unusual.

ETZ:

It certainly is. And it's a wonderful relationship. I mean, do you, did you talk about music that you were writing…

LF:

Oh always.

ETZ:

…a great deal? Did you show each other your pieces and things?

LF:

Exactly, we played each other our new works and tried them out on each other. Criticized, sometimes quite severely, and never got in an argument.

ETZ:

That's real family. That's very…

LF:

Yes family, he was like an older brother. If, I remember in the very first day, when I was still a young boy from Paris, he would, he would for instance explain jokes to me and, I mean, he gave me and education in a sense.

ETZ:

[laughs] I'm sure he, even as a young person knew all the jokes too, right.

LF:

Yes. He knew all the jokes. I didn't.

ETZ:

Lukas. Is there anything left that you'd like to cover? Any topics that you find of interest or people…

LF:

It'll come to me after we say goodbye, I'm sure.

ETZ:

Well of course.

LF:

Now I can't think of anything that I should cover, that would be important to the archives. Let's see, we covered Hindemith, Bartok, Stravinsky…

ETZ:

No.

LF:

Once Stravinsky asked me, "Lukas, who is your favorite nineteenth century composer?" Didn't I tell you that story?

ETZ:

[laughs] No you didn't.

LF:

And I said, “Well, I hate to tell you,” “Why?” “Well, because you don’t like him,” “Well who is it?” I said, “Richard Wagner.” By the way, now I would probably say Tchaikovsky or Verdi, but at that time it was Wagner, so I said Wagner. “Why, Wagner is a great composer, why not?” “Well, because in your autobiography you said it was like movie music.” “No, I never meant that. I know Wagner, important composer, but I thought that he was dangerous for things. And now I realize that anything important is dangerous for things. It is up to things to watch out for themselves!”

ETZ:

[laughs] That’s a wonderful story.

LF:

Isn’t that great.

ETZ:

Yeah. That’s [laughs] Yeah. Do you have anymore little anecdotes tucked away in your pocket that you’d like to share with us?

LF:

There probably are more but I can’t pull them out of my hat like that.

ETZ:

I’m sure there were some evenings in the Russian Tea Room with this gang of a…

LF:

Oh yes! Oh yes! Here’s another one, here’s another one. What was the name of the dancer? Nureyev, yes. Stravinsky and I were having something at the Russian Tea Room and who walks in but Nureyev of all people and he just, he didn’t want to interrupt our conversation, but he said, “Hello” to both us very nicely and spoke to Stravinsky for a while, and I said, “My goodness, isn’t he charismatic.” “Charismatic, yes. A little stupid, but a little stupidity goes a long way.”

ETZ:

[laughs]

LF:

That's a nasty story, I shouldn't have told that one. That was actually a joke on charisma. You know he felt that…

ETZ:

Yeah, yeah.

LF:

You know he himself, Stravinsky walked on stage as if he were going to the bathroom in a hurry.

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

He had that wonderful quick stride. Nothing charismatic, just energy.

ETZ:

Get it done, yeah.

LF:

But not charismatic.

ETZ:

Yeah.

LF:

He didn't walk like Karajan, "Here I come, the great man of music." Not a bit, it's just like going to the bathroom.

ETZ:

Well Reiner I guess, was like that.

LF:

Reiner conducted, yes, sometimes as if he was half asleep, yes it's true. Yeah.

ETZ:

There was a story, I don't whether it's true. There was a double bass player set up a telescope in Pittsburgh.

LF:

Oh yeah, I know that story.

ETZ:

To, you know, because his beat was too small.

LF:

That's a wonderful story, yeah.

ETZ:

I don't know if it's true. It's one of those stories where if it isn't true, it's good anyway. That's a good story.

LF:

Yeah.

ETZ:

Lukas, thank you so much for sharing so much of your musical history…

LF:

Well, it's been wonderful.

ETZ:

And your ideas with us today and…

LF:

It's been great. It's been great. I hope you have most of it on your camera.

LF:

Otherwise, whatever happened is, you know, like the traffic. There's certain things you can't do anything about. They just happen.

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